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DUSKY DARRELL, Trapper; or, The Green Ranger of the Yellowstone.

BY EDWIN EMERSON.



"HANGNATION! HOW CAN I EVER GET THAT WATCH BACK?" "TAKE DAT, TOO," GRUNTED THE INDIAN, POINTING TO THE DIAMOND PIN ON HIS BREAST.

Dusky Darrell, Trapper;

OR,
The Green Ranger of the Yellowstone

BY EDWIN EMERSON.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED.

"HANGNATION! I guess it wasn't a camp-fire, after all."

"But I am sure it was. I saw it too plainly to be mistaken. Look! there it is again."

It was a dark night, and two horsemen were moving slowly across a wide stretch of prairie not far from the Oregon Trail. Had it been light it could have been seen that these night riders were right from the heart of civilization, as their dress, manners and untanned faces bore testimony that they had but recently entered the wilds of the great North-west, and had not as yet experienced its dangers and hardships. In personal appearance they were very unlike. One was a young man of good figure and handsome features, who sat his horse like a knight-errant, and rode with an ease and skill that showed he had long practiced the art. He was modest in his dress and bearing, and there was something peculiarly attractive in his face—a look of blended candor, generosity and plain truthfulness, that won the good-will of all whom he met.

The other was a person whose age was about the same as that of the first one, but smaller of stature, slim and wiry. His clothes were foppish in their cut, and clung to him with the constancy of a brother, while amid the linen ruffles of his shirt a genuine diamond sparkled in the starlight. In fine, he bore every appearance of a city exquisite, accustomed to crowded, thoroughfares, ladies' smiles, the glitter of fashion, and full-length mirrors by which to view and admire his image. He seemed sadly out of place in this unsettled region, hundreds of miles from any human habitation, except, perhaps, those of murderous Indians. He wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses, a profusion of rings on his fingers, and light, flowing mutton-chop whiskers that were apparently his special pride. He held the end of a fragrant cigar in his mouth, which he puffed leisurely and mechanically. Both were well armed; each carried, besides smaller weapons, a valuable rifle resting horizontally across the pommel of his saddle.

It had not been dark an hour, but there was no moon to assist the feeble stars in lighting the lower world, and the gloom of midnight reigned. The two men were riding in a westerly direction, both eagerly leaning forward on their horses' necks, as if gazing at some point ahead.

"Do you see it again?" asked the dandyish individual, straining his eyes through the darkness.

"To be sure I do," said the other, in a soft, clear tone; "I see it plainly. Where are your eyes, Perkins?"

"Behind my glasses—ah! I do see it, by the Dutch! Why, that's as plain as the nose on a man's face, isn't it, Rathburn? Do you think it is a fire?"

"Certainly; what else can it be?"

"Jack-o'-lantern, maybe. If it's a fire, what the deuce makes it disappear so many times?"

"The simple fact that it is not on the open prairie. Don't you remember seeing a small patch of timber off in this direction just before nightfall? It must be in that the fire has been kindled."

"That's it," said the exquisite, brightening up; "that's it sure as you live. It is in the timber, and the trees hide it once in a while. I wonder how far away it is?"

"The grove cannot be more than a half-mile distant."

"And must we keep right on? Hangnation! this don't suit me, Rathburn. I'm not afraid—I'm not afraid of anything, as far as that is concerned—but I'm not particularly pleased with the idea of marching into a squad of redskins."

The man addressed as Rathburn smiled, but in the darkness the smile was not observed by his companion.

"I think they are not Indians," he rejoined, "but some friendly white men who are better acquainted with the country than we, and who will guide us to the verge of civilization. In my opinion we run little risk in going forward, though, probably, if I were more experienced, I would not think of such a thing. We will see

who has made that fire, at all hazards, for perhaps it would be even better to meet with Indians than to remain longer on the illimitable prairie, alone and lost. Of course you are not afraid to go with me, Perkins?"

"Certainly not—what an idea!" said Perkins, with a few vigorous puffs of smoke. "What put such a thing in your head? Dem it! haven't I just been telling you that I am afraid of nothing? No enemy values his life that will deliberately cross my path when I'm the least bit out of humor."

Rathburn did not reply to this, and the two horsemen rode a short distance in silence.

As they neared the grove, to which they were attracted by the tiny, starlike point of light mentioned in their conversation, they became more circumspect in their movements. They advanced as slowly as they could compel their animals to walk, each looking intently at the light, but unable to learn more from the sharp look-out than they had at first realized. Nothing, except the light itself, was visible, and eagerly as they listened to catch the sound of human voices, nothing reached their ears save the far-distant bark of the prairie-wolf. They went nearer and nearer; still, to all appearance, they were the only human beings in the vicinity, and the fire was fed by spirit hands. They turned about and rode backward and forward, making a few circles near the edge of the timber, in order to reconnoiter the spot before venturing to approach nearer.

When some time had been spent in such maneuvers, Rathburn gave the word, and they rode boldly into the grove. They drew rein near the fire, and sat motionless in their saddles gazing about in a state of perplexity and uneasiness. There was the fire at their horses' feet, crackling merrily and showing by its fitfully consumed fuel that it had been recently replenished. Nothing else, betokening the presence of human beings, was seen or heard. The person who had started the flames, had evidently fled at their approach. This was conclusive evidence, in the minds of our adventurers, that the person was an enemy.

"Hang it! I move we get out of this at our earliest convenience," said Perkins, growing nervous. "I'm getting entirely too warm, sitting here so close to this fire, and I wouldn't be surprised if I should—should melt, if I stay here longer."

"The motion is a sound one," returned Rathburn, as he darted piercing glances through the trees in every direction. "There were, undoubtedly, one or more Indians here ten minutes ago, and they can not be far away now. Probably it were better to leave at once, instead of waiting to be attacked."

They took a parting look at the fire and its surroundings, and gathered the reins preparatory to start away. But just then there was a rustle and a bound near by, and a shadowy, crouching figure darted through the air directly toward them! It landed in front of the horses like a rubber ball—a strong hand seized the rein of each—the alarmed steeds reared and plunged, in vain effort to break loose from the stranger's grasp, and for a moment the riders were obliged to put forth their skill in order to keep their seats! When the trembling animals were partially quieted, the form of a man was seen standing between their heads. The alarmed horsemen leaned forward and scanned the form closely.

At first a dark human shape was all that could be discerned, but, as the stranger removed his grasp from the curbs and took a step backward, the light from the fire fell full upon his face. Greatly to their relief, they observed that he was a man of their own color and kin, and not an Indian, as they had at first believed. He was about forty years old, possessing a kindly face, though scarred, weather-beaten and bronzed; and his every appearance proclaimed him a resident of the mountains, prairie and forest, and of all that wild country lying west of the civilized world. Beyond a doubt he was a roving hunter and trapper. He wore the veritable coon-skin cap, drawn down to the shaggy eyebrows in front, with the barred tail drooping almost to his shoulders behind; and his hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins were composed entirely of buckskin. He was of medium size, neither burly nor tall, but for all that, a good type of the physical man. Rolls of muscle stood out like bands of steel on arms and legs, showing that there was much more strength in the frame than its size indicated.

His countenance was decidedly pleasant. The prevailing expressions were mildness and good-humor, but, to the close observer, those bright, gleaming eyes revealed a temper that was un-

governable when aroused. The strange being stepped back, folded his arms over the muzzle of his long, black rifle, and gazed steadily at the twain that had ridden so boldly into his camp.

"Good-evening, sir," ventured Rathburn, when it became apparent that nobody else would break the silence.

"Who be you, and what you prowlin' round hyur fur?" gruffly demanded the trapper.

"Why, sir, you do not suppose we are here for any improper purpose? We have been lost on the prairie since yesterday morning, and seeing this fire to-night, we were naturally attracted to it, with the hope of finding friends."

"To be sure—to be sure," put in Perkins, tremulously. "There's no necessity for getting scared. We—we are not going to hurt you—'pon my word we are not."

The stranger eyed the speaker curiously for some moments, and then a broad smile illumined his visage.

"See yer, Spider," he said; "you can't blame a feller fur gittin' a little skeered at sight o' you! I hain't met a dangerouser-lookin' chap fur nigh onto some time."

"Of course—yes—that is a sufficient excuse," and the conceited fellow straightened his elegant figure and put on a most ferocious look.

At this the stranger's whole frame shook in a fit of noiseless but unrestrained laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Perkins, indignantly, beginning to suspect that he was making sport of him.

The inquiry was not heeded, but when his mirth had abated, the trapper looked up and said:

"Yer handles, ef yer please?"

"Mine, sir, is Henry Rathburn," answered that gentleman, "and that of my friend is Adolphus Perkins. We are cousins, and are fresh from the States."

"That's plain as the nose on yer face; but what part of the States do you hail from?"

"Boston, Massachusetts."

The hunter's eyes opened to their widest extent, and he indulged in a prolonged whistle of surprise.

"Cl'ar from the Atlantic ocean, be you? 'Tain't often we see chaps from them parts, out in this kentry. War you travelin' cross the plains?"

"Yes; we were traveling with a wagon-train until yesterday."

"After gold, I take it?"

"There is just where you are mistaken, my friend. Neither myself nor cousin have been afflicted with the gold mania. We started on a trip to Oregon in pursuit of health and pleasure, but we already see our mistake in choosing this region to obtain the latter boon."

"You're lost, I believe you said?"

"We are. Yesterday morning we became separated from the caravan with which we were journeying. We had purposely fallen behind, to converse on a subject that concerned us alone, and we unwittingly allowed the distance between us and the emigrants to increase, until the latter were several miles ahead. Embracing this opportunity, four prowling Indians, well mounted and armed, cut us off from the company, and made for us in a very warlike manner. They chased us nearly the whole day in an easterly direction. We succeeded in killing one and wounding another, and near evening the horse of a third tumbled headlong to the ground, and was unable to rise. This left only one mounted Indian, and he, of course, gave up the chase, leaving us to go our way unmolested. But, in our flight, we had digressed from the trail so far that we could not find it again, and in our efforts to do so to-day we described a complete circle on the prairie. About an hour ago we descried your fire, and eagerly turned our horses' heads toward it."

The trapper looked from one to the other several times, with an expression of blended wonder and amusement.

"Wagh! you're powerful green. Anybody ought to know better nor to ride up to a feller's blaze 'ithout knowin' whose 'tis. Ef thar'd been a dozen or so reds squattin' round it, you'd never know'd what become o' yer ha'r."

"Will you give us your name?"

"I ain't ashamed on't. I answers to the handle of Dusky Darrell, and the plains and mountains have been my home fur twenty years. Now on my way to the trappin'-grounds."

"Where do you trap?"

"Up 'mong the beaver-runs of the Yaller-stone. But, see yer, fellers, ef you're goin' to stay with me to-night, why the bufflers don't you come down off your hosses?"

Our two friends did not wait for a second invitation, but at once slid out of their saddles, and hitched their animals to the nearest trees. Having, for over twenty-four hours, experienced the horror of being lost on the prairie, when the sky was so overcast that they had been unable to tell one direction from another, it was by no means unpleasant to come across such a man as this they had met with. It was evident that he had his whims and odd fancies, but they knew he possessed an equal share of kindness, candor and good-humor, and, being a trapper who had tramped the wilderness for many a year, he could easily guide them out of it.

The three men seated themselves around the fire. Dusky Darrell proceeded to broil some fresh meat, which his two companions helped him to devour with a gusto, and then, filling and lighting his pipe, he began to smoke and stare vacantly into the fire, with as much composure and heedlessness as if he were entirely alone. Adolphus Perkins looked suspiciously at him through his glasses, from a respectful distance, and thought him too savage a looking being to put any faith in.

Rathburn saw that it would require close questioning to obtain any information from the eccentric trapper, and after a brief silence, he began:

"You say you are on your way to the trapping-grounds of the Yellowstone?"

The trapper nodded, without looking up.

"It is a long distance to travel afoot."

"Hyr's what don't travel afoot when he knows hisself. Thar's a hoss out on the prairie thar, croppin' the grass."

"Ah! you set him free of nights? I presume, from the appearance of the sky at present," added the young man, looking up, "that the sun will shine clearly to-morrow. In such a case we will have no further difficulty in finding the Oregon trail. Do you know how far away it is?"

"'Bout ten mile, or thar'abouts. It's on the north bank of the Platte river, which it follers to the mountains, and I crossed the Platte some time this afternoon."

"It lies southward from this spot, of course?"

"Exactly."

"And that way is south," spoke up Adolphus, pointing directly toward the arctic regions.

"No 'tain't," growled the trapper; "the opposite d'rection are south."

"We will ride down to the Oregon trail to-morrow," said Rathburn, turning to his cousin, "and, if you are willing, we will go on to Oregon, or California, alone."

"Demnition! ain't you afraid to do that?" exclaimed Perkins, horrified.

"Not in the least—are you?"

"Me!—preposterous! You might know my only anxiety is for you. The fact is, your mother told me to take care of you, and keep you out of danger as much as possible."

"Oh, you rascal!" laughed Rathburn.

The conversation came to an abrupt termination here, and for awhile Rathburn gazed thoughtfully into the fire. Then he looked alternately at his companions, and, at length, he turned to the hunter and said:

"Darrell, as we are aiming at no particular point in our travels, will you permit us to accompany you to the north?"

There was a short silence, and then the reply:

"Ef you wants to go with me I reckon you kin, but you're not to let your infarnal greenness interfere with my business."

"By no means. We will cheerfully comply with all your reasonable wishes."

"You mought as well b'ar in mind that I'm goin' to stay up thar till next spring—unless a sartin thing happens."

"And what is that certain thing?" asked Adolphus.

But no answer was vouchsafed to this inquiry, and the interrogator had not the courage to repeat it.

So it was decided that they should accompany the trapper to his wilderness home, and get a taste of wild life before returning to the States; and with this decision to dream about, they all lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

A WARM RECEPTION AND A COLD BATH.

THEY were astir at an early hour in the morning, a fire kindled and breakfast hastily prepared.

"Thar's no use wastin' time," said Dusky Darrell, as he ate. "I likes to travel of mornin's better'n at any other part of the day. Ef you goes with me, reckon as how you'll have to do as I does."

The repast over, Darrell gave vent to a shrill whistle, and a fine black horse came galloping into the grove. Without delay they all mounted, and the next minute were cantering gayly over the prairie in a northerly course. Dusky Darrell proved himself a pleasant companion, and grew in one's favor as his oddities became less puzzling. He was evidently pleased with the plain frankness and manly bearing of Henry Rathburn, and was more communicative than at first; and the latter looked forward with a thrill of pleasurable anticipation to the life of excitement he was entering upon.

Adolphus Perkins, however, who was less fond of adventure than his cousin, almost turned pale at the bare thought of tarrying so long in the Indian country. He was not afraid—of course not!—but he had not so much as the shadow of a razor in his possession, and what would his favorite mutton-chop whiskers come to without one?

At noon they halted, appeased their hunger and rested an hour; after which they continued their journey more leisurely. Shortly after sunset they dismounted and struck camp on the bank of a creek, and cooked their evening meal. After partaking to their satisfaction of the choicest portions of a young buffalo, which the trapper's deadly rifle had brought down, they whiled away an hour or two in smoking and conversation, before turning in for the night. The trapper thought they would not be safe if all closed their eyes at once. During the afternoon they had met a small party of Pawnee Indians who had approached them with every sign of friendship, and with whom they had conversed some time through the medium of one who spoke broken English. Although they had spared no efforts to appear friendly to the whites, the observant eyes of Darrell had detected something in their looks that made him suspect them of deceit.

It fell to the lot of Adolphus to stand guard first, as there was thought to be little or no danger before midnight, and so Rathburn and the trapper consigned themselves to the comforting embrace of Morpheus. Adolphus took his gun and began to walk in a circle around his sleeping companions, feeling the importance of his position, and believing, after some reflection, that no one could fill it quite as well as he. It was a calm, starry night, and the awful stillness soon began to tell on the sentinel. He grew very nervous and wished a storm would come up, or anything to make a noise, and created as much disturbance as possible himself. At length he heard the quick, sharp bark of a wolf not far away, and the answering bark of another in the opposite direction. Even this was a relief, although his hair felt as if it were rising on end as he thought of being attacked by those ravenous animals.

"Hangnation! I wish I'd never come to the West," he exclaimed. "I can't see why I wanted to leave home, anyway."

He paused suddenly, and stood petrified in his tracks. His gun fell from his hands, his eyes flew open, his face assumed an ashen hue and a cold chill crept over him, as he saw a dark body rise above the edge of the river-bank! He could not make out the shape of the body, but he thought it looked like some sort of an animal. It came up from the water's edge with the utmost caution, and then crept stealthily along the ground toward an adjacent clump of bushes. Perkins watched it with horrified consternation until it disappeared, and then throwing himself on the ground he covered himself head and feet with his blanket! After lying thus a minute or two, he cautiously threw off the blanket and raised his head. All was quiet. His two friends were sleeping placidly beside him and nothing of a suspicious nature was seen or heard. He seized his rifle and sprung to his feet, determined to show no such weakness again, nor hide from any threatened peril.

What was his surprise and horror when he saw another dark object come slowly up the bank of the creek, precisely in the same manner as the first! This one, also, moved noiselessly toward the bushes behind which the other had disappeared, but Adolphus grew brave all at once, and resolved that it should not pass from view unmolested.

"It's only a wolf," he thought, "and I'll teach it to provoke the anger of so dangerous a man as I am. I'll just shoot it, and show them fellows I'm some."

He cocked his rifle, and brought it to bear on the dark, moving object. He took aim, closed his eyes, averted his face and fired. Strangely enough the ball went straight to the mark. There was a wild, fearful sound—a horrid,

crazing scream, as of a human being in the agonies of death—so long, loud and unearthly that Adolphus was paralyzed with terror! Then rose another yell, or series of yells, as if a score of demons had joined their voices to make the night hideous with their cries. It was the war-whoop of the Indians!

As if by magic a half-dozen shadowy figures appeared, leaping about in the darkness. Then Perkins heard the sound of a rushing body, and something heavy came against him with such violence as to almost throw him off his feet. He was grappled by strong hands—sinewy fingers clutched his throat—a dark, demoniacal face was thrust close to his—a knife glittered before his eyes, and for a moment the poor fellow thought his last breath was drawn. But, just then, a rifle was discharged near by, and Perkins was at once released from the iron grasp. He saw an Indian writhing in mortal pain at his feet, and heard the stentorian voice of Dusky Darrell shout:

"Down with 'em, boys! Don't leave a grease-spot of the imps!"

Perkins waited to see no more. Scarcely conscious of what he did, he wheeled and dashed headlong toward the creek, his coat-tails flying like banners in the wind. Wild with fright, he leaped down the bank, and plunged recklessly into the water, sinking from view on the instant!

Meanwhile Darrell and Rathburn were among the Indians, fighting for their lives. Each had discharged his rifle, with good effect, and clubbed them. The trapper brained a brawny wretch with a single blow of his gun-stock, and then sprung upon another with his knife. Rathburn, in a like manner, broke the arm of a savage, who wisely took to his heels with his wounded member, and was soon swallowed up by the darkness. The trapper made short work of his man. There was a brief struggle—a glitter of steel—a quick thrust and a groan, and another enemy lay stretched out in death. This left but one to contend with. The solitary savage, observing how matters stood, set up a howl and darted away with the speed of the wind, leaving the whites undisputed masters of the field. The conflict was as bloody as it was short. While Rathburn was flushed and panting with excitement, Dusky Darrell coolly began to tear the scalps from the heads of the victims.

"Why do you do that?" exclaimed the young man, turning sick at the sight.

"'Cause it's my l'arnin', I s'pose," was the quiet response. "You don't often ketch this grizzly passin' by such top knots as these."

"Why, the Indians could do no worse than that, themselves?"

"I don't want 'em to do as bad, with me. Dusky Darrell have got to turn up his toes one of these days, and I reckon the reds 'll git his ha'r, so I mought as well be takin' the worth on't while I can. Wagh!"

And he fastened the reeking trophies to his girdle.

"I say, are they all gone?"

It was a very familiar voice that gave utterance to these words, and turning toward it they saw Adolphus Perkins approaching with hesitating steps, his garments saturated and clinging closer to his limbs than ever. Rathburn burst into a hearty laugh, and the hunter's eyes twinkled.

"Whar' you been, Spider?"

"Me! Oh, I've been taking a cold bath," he carelessly replied.

"Smash me, I believe you're afeard of red-skins."

"Me afraid! Surely, you don't know what you are talking about. Is it possible you have taken up that strain? There's Rathburn, he hasn't told me I'm a coward less than a dozen times since leaving home, and I'm getting sick of it. If I had not known that he was jesting, I should have shot him full of holes long ago, and I suspect I should anyway had I not remembered the relationship existing between us. Why, confound it, didn't I kill the first Indian that was killed to-night? Certainly I did, while you were asleep, and after you awoke I concluded to take a little swim while you were finishing the rest."

Considering that Adolphus really had done pretty good service, his tormentors ceased their laughing, and Adolphus believed he had gained a point by his able remarks.

None of them slept any more that night, though Darrell said they might with safety. The party that had attacked them was the same they had met during the day, and as only two survived, further molestation was not to be expected that night.

About two hours before daylight they were in their saddles and on the move, and were some distance further on their way by sunrise, when they halted for breakfast. Long before noon they crossed Loup Fork, or Pawnee river, a tributary of the Platte, and leaving this stream, they turned their horses' heads toward the north-west, aiming at the northern spur of the Black Hills. This course they followed until their destination was reached.

It is not worth while to enter into the particulars of that long journey to the trapping-grounds of the North-west. It was wearisome at times, it had its pleasures and excitement, and Rathburn rather enjoyed it than otherwise. Concerning Perkins there is a doubt, for he often looked as though he would much rather be under the roof of his city home than in a country where he was in constant terror from roving Indians. After traveling for many days over broad, level prairies, and wild mountainous regions—through storm and calm, and perils innumerable—our three friends drew rein one glorious afternoon on the bank of the Yellowstone. They struck the river in the center of a vast wilderness, where the foot of advancing civilization was not to be set for years to come, and where the scenery was so imposing in its grandeur as to strike the looker-on with awe. On the opposite side of the stream was a dense forest, coming down to the verge of the low banks and stretching far away to the north, south and west. With its contrasted hues of green, yellow and brown, it presented a picture of rare beauty.

"Wal, hyur we are," said Darrell, as they reined in their horses and looked about.

"At last," added Adolphus, with a deep-drawn breath. "I'm confounded glad we have no more riding to do, for I'll be hanged if I ain't sick of it."

"Where is your home?" answered Rathburn, glancing about in vain endeavor to catch a glimpse of some sort of a habitation.

"My home's on t'other side of the water, 'bout a half-mile down-stream, but we'll jist dismount hyur and turn the hosses loose."

"Turn the horses loose?"

"Sart'inly. We won't need 'em ag'in till spring. This is rich bottom-land, and we can't find a better place to leave 'em."

"But I'm afraid we'll wake up some fine morning and find no horses here."

"Like 's not. Mine won't wander away, though, and I reckon yourn won't leave mine. If Injuns steal 'em, or wolves run 'em away, we'll have to foot it back to the States; that's all."

As he spoke the trapper slid out of his saddle, and began to gaze sharply in every direction, as though he were looking for something. The object of his search was soon espied, and he walked straight toward a large hollow tree that stood a short distance away. From an orifice in the base of the tree he drew to light a small birchen canoe, which he at once shoved into the water. The others understood this movement, and quickly jumped to the ground.

"The red-skins hain't disturbed nothin' on this side," said Darrell, "and we'll see how 'tis on t'other side in a minute."

The horses were now stripped of their appurtenances and set free. The saddles, bridles, etc., were placed in the canoe, and then the trio stepped in, sinking the light craft to its gun-wales. The trapper took up the paddle, and they moved cautiously out into the current. They headed down-stream, but, at the same time, gradually neared the western shore. It was near the close of the afternoon, and half of the broad river was shaded by the trees that lined its margin. As they glided into the shadows, the partial gloom and the stillness were impressive in their solemnity, and Adolphus began to think of a great many startling things.

After awhile they put in to shore, and ran the canoe under the thick undergrowth that grew along the brink. As they leaped up the bank they found themselves in front of a huge, gray rock about fifteen feet in height, and much greater in diameter. It rose sheer up from the level ground, presenting a smooth, perpendicular front, and all around it grew a dense thicket, so low and tangled that it could only be passed through with difficulty.

"Hyur's whar we're goin' to lodge this winter," said Darrell, making his way through the thicket.

Pulling aside the bushes, he disclosed a recess in the face of the rock, large enough to admit the body of a man. He entered in a stooping posture, signifying by a slight jerk of the hand that the others were to follow him. They did

so with some hesitancy, creeping into the dark recess behind their guide, Perkins holding to his cousin's coat-tail with a nervous grasp. In a moment they emerged into a spacious cavern. Here they stopped, and Darrell struck a light. As the blaze flamed up from the pine-knot he held in his hand, it lighted up the chamber, and revealed every rent and fissure in the gloomy walls. It showed unmistakably that it had formerly been occupied. A few worthless furs, a buffalo-robe, a pair of elk's horns and several such trophies were to be seen, while other and different things gave evidence that human hands had been at work there long before. A few fragments of half-burned wood lay in the center of the apartment, and just above them, in the ceiling, were a number of small crevices, which had served, no doubt, to give the smoke egress.

"Good gracious! are we going to live in this miserable hole?" asked Perkins, after surveying the cave through his eye-glasses.

"This is whar we're to lodge," replied Darrell.

"Indeed, I rather like it," said Rathburn. "It is a better shelter than I expected to find in this region, and will at least be comfortable during the bitter cold days that are to come. Were you here last year, Darrell?"

"No; I hain't stopped hyur fur a spell—five seasons, I reckon. Since quittin' this spot I've been carryin' on my business in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company, furdur up country. Don't know that I'd ever have come back to these grounds, ef it hadn't been fur a little circumstance that tuck place."

"What was that circumstance?" asked Perkins.

"I ain't tellin' jist now. Wait till night, and maybe I'll tell you all 'bout it then, ef you want to know. I must go out now and set the traps afore it gits dark, and I counts on a purty good haul in the mornin'. I've see'd plenty of beaver-sign to-day. Come with me, ef you wants to see how the thing's done."

The light was extinguished, and they all left the cave as they had entered.

Once more seating themselves in the canoe, Darrell took up the paddle and thrust its blade beneath the water. Rowing with his usual caution, he kept the canoe close to the shore for some time, and then turned into a small stream that flowed into the Yellowstone. Running up this a little distance, he proceeded to set his traps, somewhat to the amusement and edification of his companions. This accomplished, they turned about and rowed back to the cave.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF THE BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE.

ALTHOUGH yet early autumn, the night was chilly, and as the three men re-entered the wide, gloomy cave, Darrell gathered some fuel and started a fire. The flames roared and crackled on the rocky floor, casting fantastic shadows on the walls, and making the yawning rents and recesses look darker and more forbidding than ever, in the contrast. The smoke ascended in spiral wreaths, and escaped at the numerous crevices above. They prepared and ate their evening meal, and then, reclining round the comfortable blaze, they passed away the time in smoking and talking. Darrell, being in one of his communicative moods, recounted many of the thrilling events of his life, and gave the inexperienced twain a few instructions in hunting, trapping and Indian-fighting.

After much fidgeting and chewing the end of his cigar to a pulp, Adolphus ventured to remark:

"You said this evening, Darrell—hem!—that you would tell us the cause of your coming here this season."

The trapper smoked awhile in silence, staring vacantly into the fire, and then replied:

"Wal, it ain't much of a story, but sich as it is you can hear it.* I mought as well tell you now as at any other time, I s'pose, 'cause you'll have to know it 'fore we leave these parts—no two ways 'bout it. Five years ago I diskivered this lodge, and seein' a heap of good sign I determined to squat yer a season, and see what luck thar war in this section. Beaver and otter warn't skeerce by a long shot, and I hauled in one or t'other nearly every day fur awhile, but my good fortune soon had an interruption that I hadn't counted on very strong. One day, in goin' the rounds, I found every

*The story of the captive is here recorded precisely as it was related to the writer by the lady herself. She is still living, honored and esteemed by all who know her, and to-day there is not a more benevolent or active lady in society than she whose early life was spent among the savages of the great north-western wilderness.

cussed trap empty, jist as they had been fur two or three days afore. The suddint end of my success war summit surprisin', and I growed desprit suspicious. When the next day come round, and still no game, I swore I'd find out what it meant. So I began to s'arch around, and soon found a moccasin track in the snow. To own up, I felt kinder oneasy when I made this diskivery, 'cause it proved that the thief was an Injun, and I thought the imps must have found out whar I was lodgin' afore that time. In sich a case they'd sartintly be down on me in a twinklin', and even then they mought be layin' in wait fur me round my home. These thoughts didn't please me the greatest, but I made my way back yer 'bout as quick as I could. I was on the p'int of walkin' into the cave, when I was stopped by the purtiest critter I ever set eyes on! It was a little gal, 'bout fourteen years old, with dark-brown ha'r, and eyes that looked right through a feller. She was dressed like an Injun, but I could see thar wasn't a drop of red blood in her veins. I hain't see'd a powerful sight of females in my day, but of all I ever did see I sw'ar that little gal was the purtiest. I thought she war a speerit when I first see'd her.

"Wal, as I said, I war jist goin' to come in here when this little angel stepped in front of me, and told me she wanted to speak a word or two fur my own good. She told me the Injuns had found out I was thar, and war goin' to come down on me that very night! She said the varmints had suspicioned fur over a week that a white man was around, and now that they knowed it to a sartinty they war bent on takin' possession of my ha'r and traps. She begged me to go away at once, and not brave thar fury. I promised to do as she said, and then I fell to axin' the child some questions. I larnt that she had been captur'd by the Injuns four years before—that her parents had been murdered at the same time—that she was toler'ble well treated by her captors, and a good deal more. I axed her what her handle was, and she said it war Myrtle Forrest."

"Demnition! what a pretty name!" muttered Adolphus. "Maybe it isn't going to be so bad, after all, this sojourn in the wilderness. If there is to be a beautiful maiden in the mix, I'm willing to take up my abode here."

"I tuck a like to the gal," resumed the trapper, "and when she began to cry 'bout her dead parents, I'm blowed ef Dusky Darrell could hardly keep from cryin' too. I wanted her to go with me to the States, and live with her own people, but she wouldn't do it. She said the Injuns war the only friends she had in this world, and she'd end her days with 'em. After beggin' me over and over to cut sticks as quick as possible, she left me."

"The warnin' war a timely one, fur I had no more'n packed my pelts and sloped when the imps swarmed around this rock like a lot of bees goin' into winter-quarters. But I got away clear as a whistle, though I's pursued half a day. I went down to Independence, Missouri, to barter away my furs, and while I was thar I told sev'ral fellers 'bout the white gal up among the Blackfeet. Some of 'em got interested in the story, and I told 'em all that had passed 'twixt her and me, not omittin' to tell her handle. After that I came north, and somehow or other got among them Hudson Bay fellers, and stayed with 'em fur a long spell. I thought of the little captive a good deal, and war sorry I hadn't urged her harder to go with me when I left fur the settlements."

"Last spring I found myself down in Missouri ag'in. I larnt that the story hadn't died out thar in five years, but had made sorter of a sensation. It had been blowed around purty extensively that I'd seen one of the handsomest gals in the univarse, up among the Blackfeet, and a rich woman that lives in St. Louis somehow got wind of the tale. It was said that she was awfully excited when she heard it and found out the name of the child, and that she wanted to see me mighty bad. The chap as told me all this, sent a message to the lady informin' her as how I'd arrove, and may I be shot ef she didn't come clear from St. Louis to Independence fur an interview with me. She was a scorchin' fine woman. She was dressed in black, and she looked like a queen, but thar warn't no stuck-upedness 'bout her, that's said. She looked pale and sadlike, and I knowed at onc't that she'd seen a heap of trouble in her day, and she had ha'r and eyes that reminded me of the little captive."

"Her name was Forrest, she said, and she'd once had a child named Myrtle. Her husband had been killed, and her child carried away by Injuns while they was with an emigrant party

among the mountains, long time ago. Her and two others managed to make thar escape in some mirac'lous way, and all the rest had to go under. The woman had never s'posed her daughter was livin', till she heard 'bout what I'd seen. She was cryin' all the time she was talkin' to me, and I told her as well as I knowed how, every thing the gal had told me. Thar warn't no doubt 'bout it—the captive was Mrs. Forrest's daughter? It war nine years ago that she war taken prisoner by the Blackfeet, and she war ten years old at the time of her captur'.

"Mrs. Forrest said she would give me all she owned ef I'd restore the lost one to her arms. I wouldn't take a cent. I'd been thinkin' fur some time 'bout takin' another tramp up in these parts, to see ef my little friend was still alive, so I told the mother I'd be off without delay. She wanted me to take a big reward in advance, but I told her when Dusky Darrell needed money so bad that he must be paid fur kind offices, he'd let her know. She took my hand and kissed it, and said God would reward me, and then I swore by heaven and 'arth that I would bring her daughter home, or leave my carcass on the banks of the Yallerstone. That's the talk I used, and I'll keep my word ef the gal's livin'."

"Perhaps the tribe that holds her is not now in this vicinity," said Rathburn.

"Ef not, I'll hunt till I finds it. She's got to turn up some time or other, or this grizzly don't go back to the settlement."

"Thunderation! I've a mind to marry her if she is found," said Adolphus. "It wouldn't be so bad, after all, to go back home with a beautiful wife and a thousand or so dollars! Why, demme, I think I shall have to do it."

"Yes; do it, Spider, by all means," advised the trapper, with a sly look at Rathburn.

"Go in and win, cousin mine," added the latter, assuming an air of gravity.

Perkins accepted these remarks seriously and in good faith and began to stroke his yellowish whiskers with a wonderfully profound air. After conversing on various unimportant topics for some time longer, Darrell replenished the fire and said:

"Let's snooze."

The proposition was a good one, and in a few moments all were sound asleep, enjoying the rest they so greatly needed.

Before dawn, the trapper rose and went out, leaving his friends still asleep. Visiting his traps, he found that his success was as good as could have been expected for a beginning, and shouldering his game, he returned homeward.

On re-entering the cave, he found Rathburn and Perkins astir. A fire was started, and a breakfast of fresh beaver-meat prepared. In the afternoon they all sallied out, and strolled up and down the river, Adolphus succeeding in catching quite a number of fine fish, and Rathburn bringing down several grouse with his gun.

Three weeks passed away, and nothing worthy of note occurred within that time. The approach of an early and rigorous winter was making itself felt, and already some of the smaller streams were frozen over. The weather grew intensely cold; the fierce, cutting wind howled dismally through the vast forest, and whistled shrilly around the trapper's abode; but the three adventurers had provided themselves with food and fuel enough to last through the winter, and wanted for nothing."

Not a sign of an Indian had as yet been seen, and it was concluded there were none near. This displeased Darrell, and one day he announced a determination to go out upon a sort of scouting expedition, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the Indian village was in the vicinity or not. He started at an early hour of the morning, and returned late in the evening. As he stepped into the cave, Rathburn inquired:

"What success, Darrell?"

"Good 'nough success, I reckon, but I didn't find things as I'd like to have found 'em," was the gruff response. "While I's wanderin' about I come onto the spot whar the red-skins have been squattin' through the summer. It's in a deep valley, two or three miles away, and I could see as how they hadn't been gone more nor a week or two. But they've up stakes and gone, and it don't matter when they went."

"Where do you suppose they are now?"

"I s'pose they're goin' to winter furdur up country."

"Shall we follow them?"

"Not by a long shot. Smash me, boy, you wouldn't find a great deal of fun rovin' 'bout over the country when the coldest weather comes. Thar'd be times when comfortable quarters 'd be the most desirable thing you

could think of, fur sich places as this ain't found everywhar'."

"Then, what shall we do?"

"Stay whar we are, in course. I makes no doubt the Injuns 'll be back this way in the spring, and all that's left fur us to do is to wait fur 'em. Then we'll see what can be done fur that white captive, Myrtle Forrest."

"Poor girl—I fear she is dead," murmured Rathburn. "I pray Heaven she is not, for it would be a terrible blow to the fond mother whose hopes were raised so high by your story."

CHAPTER IV.

A BEAR-HUNT, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE winter set in, and a more severe one had never been experienced in that latitude. Winter there is of six months' duration, and so seldom do thaws relieve the bitter coldness of the long season, that it is no uncommon thing for a deep snow to remain on the ground from October until April. This time a terrific thunder-storm was the close of the warm season, and a heavy snow-storm the opening of the cold one.

For two or three days the air was white with snow, sometimes whirling in blinding eddies through the forest recesses, and at others falling thick and heavy, until it lay several feet in depth around the rock that protected our friends from the rigor of the weather.

But they were well prepared for the exigency, and reclining on their warm furs around the roaring fire, they passed the days and nights as comfortably as if it were summer. Sometimes Darrell crossed the river, to see how the horses were faring, and to provide for them as best he could. On such occasions he walked across on the ice, the Yellowstone having frozen over after the first winter storm, and, consequently, having but little snow on its surface. Every day he visited his traps, and was elated at his unusual success. Beavers, foxes, lynxes and other animals fell into his hands, and he was sure of a goodly quantity of furs for the spring trade. On these trips he generally wore the huge snow-shoes common among the Indians of that region, and, possessing but one pair of these, he was seldom accompanied by Rathburn and Perkins. There were times that were most tedious to them, but during the long evenings, they whiled away the hours in relating experiences of their lives. Most of the story-telling fell to the lot of Darrell, who seemed to never tire of giving reminiscences of his eventful career, and whose stock of yarns seemed inexhaustible.

One day the trapper returned from his daily round with an announcement that promised a little excitement to relieve the monotony of their lives. He said he had discovered the lair, or winter-quarters, of a huge grizzly bear, and he proposed a descent upon it that very night.

"He's as big a feller as I ever see'd," said the trapper, "and I wouldn't mind havin' a tussle with him, jist fur 'musement. Thar's goin' to be moonlight to-night, and we couldn't have a better time fur a bar-fight. I diskivered the varmint while I's settin' my traps, and spotted him fur this evenin', and ef you wants some sport yer's what 'll take you to it."

His companions agreed to this, and preparations were accordingly made for the proposed bear-hunt. The rifles of Perkins and Rathburn, which had lain idle for some time, underwent a course of cleaning, and there was a general whetting of knives, and filling of powder-flasks and bullet-pouches. Once Adolphus ventured to offer an objection to the enterprise, but at a sly hint from his cousin that he was afraid, he quickly changed his tone and hailed the coming event with seeming delight.

Shortly after nightfall they sallied forth. It was a calm night, but very cold. Extra garments had been donned, however, and Adolphus was so muffled up that nothing but his eyes were visible. A more suitable time could not have been selected for their sport; the moon was almost in its full, and rendered objects discernible at quite a distance, while the stars looked down with a cold twinkle from the cloudless heavens. A thick, icy crust formed the surface of the snow, capable of sustaining greater weight than theirs, and the only difficulty they experienced in walking, was in keeping upon their feet at times. They walked along the river-bank perhaps a half-mile, then turned abruptly toward the west and proceeded up a smaller stream, by the bank of which most of the traps were set. In a few minutes they came upon the first trap. Here Darrell paused, and turned toward his companions.

"Thar's no use goin' further 'thout holdin' a short consultation 'bout this thing. That griz-

zly's den ain't a great ways from this spot, and we don't want to run into him too suddint, fur I calc'late he's a rough customer. 'Tain't goin' to be the easiest thing in the world to drap the varmint, and you mought as well be countin' on some tall sparrin' afore the job's did. It ain't every day a chap wants to trouble a b'ar like this 'un, but I've begun to think a tussle a necessity jist now, 'cause I'm sp'illin' fur one."

"Let it come, if it will vary the monotony of our lives for even an hour," said Rathburn.

"I say, gentlemen," spoke Adolphus, in a weak voice, "there is no use trying to conceal the fact—I'm sick."

"Sick, 'Dolph? What ails you?"

"Hang it! how should I know? It is quite sufficient to know that I am sick, I think. It's like taking my heart's blood to miss the sport, but, really, I—I can go no further."

"Bah! come 'long," growled Darrell.

"I am ill, sir," persisted Adolphus, "and I could not move a step further if it were to save my life. There's one of your traps, behind you—hadn't I better stay here and—watch it?"

"What fur?"

"Why, maybe some animal will get caught in it while you are hunting the bear."

"S'pose he do—we'd git him in good time."

"Yes, but perhaps you have never heard of a fox, or other animal, making off with the whole concern after being caught?"

"Wagh! yer doesn't take me fur a fool, does you? Ef a varmint wants to take off that trap, he's got first to draw a heavy weight from under the snow. But you can stay hyur ef you like, Spider, seein' as how you'd do no good by goin' with us."

"Are you not afraid to remain here alone?" asked Rathburn.

"Oh! no—not in the least. If I get ill while you are absent I will go back to camp, you know."

"Why, how can you walk so far? The cavern is further away than the bear's den."

Adolphus chose to pay no heed to this inquiry, but fell to coughing violently instead.

The next moment Darrell and Rathburn turned their backs upon him, and struck off across a wide open space, in the direction of the grizzly's haunt. They were soon out of sight, and the echoing sound of their footsteps on the crusted snow gradually died away in the distance. Finding himself alone, Perkins looked about him and shuddered, and then he began striking his hands together and walking briskly round the spot, to keep his blood in circulation.

"Hanguation! this is what I call rough," he muttered, quite despondently. "I wish I had died when I was a baby. This is no place for me, anyhow, and Rathburn ought to have had more sense than to bring me away up here. Thunderation! what would mother think if she could see me to-night? If Providence permits me to return safely to Boston, I'll get desperately sick every time anybody wants me to go outside of the city. Hello! what's that?"

It was a loud, peculiar cry that fell upon his ear—a prolonged, quavering howl, so dismal in its tone that the exquisite thought he felt his blood freezing in his veins! It was repeated the next instant, and then that deathlike silence again brooded over wood and plain.

"Now, I wonder if I'm going to be attacked by wolves? Just my luck, I reckon! I'll go back to the cave, and stay there till the fellows return from their hunt. No I won't, either, because they would call me a coward then, and besides, I have told them I'm too ill to walk so far. Never mind; I've killed an Indian since coming out West, and I guess a wolf isn't—Hello! what's that?"

This time it was sight, and not sound, that caused the exclamation. About twenty yards away he had seen three or four black objects skulking along the bank of the stream! He watched them for a moment in silent horror.

"I suppose I am in for it now," he mused, sinking upon his knees. "I do wish they could leave a fellow alone! I should like to know what they've got against me. I have a presentiment that I am not going to live more than fifty years longer—HELLO! WHAT'S THAT?"

Just then there was a dull clap near by, followed by a most appalling scream, that jarred hideously on the still night air!

Adolphus clutched his rifle, and started back with a gasp of terror. The cause of the horrible cry was soon made apparent. A wolf had been caught in the trap, and, with yells of pain and fright, was tugging furiously to get away. The cries of the unfortunate brute were taken up by a score of throats, and answered from every point of the compass, while several dark, lank bodies were seen slinking

from point to point. Adolphus saw more than one pair of glowing eyes fastened upon him, and realized that he was surrounded by the cadaverous animals; but their slowness of action made him believe that they were afraid of him, and partially dispelled his own fear.

The entrapped wolf continued his noise, and his frantic endeavors to escape, but in vain. An idea struck Adolphus as he observed this, and he stepped forward and cocked his gun.

"Hangnation! I'm no coward," he blustered, going up close to the trap. "I'll just knock thunder and lightning out of you, to show you what a desperate man I am, you skeleton sneak-thief! Any one who has the hardihood to prowl about my premises after sunset must abide by the consequences. Now don't pull your leg off, but remain quiet till I get my gun loaded. Maybe it's already loaded, but I wouldn't swear to it, and there's nothing like certainty."

Drawing the ramrod he hastily pounded down an extra charge into his gun.

"Look out for your head now—"

Bang! went his rifle, twice as loud as usual, echoing on the still air like the report of a small cannon. That the bullet went true to its aim, was proved by the sharp yelp that followed the discharge; but Adolphus heard it not. The first thing that was plain to him after pulling the trigger, was that he was lying flat upon his back, his heels beating the air and his empty rifle lying several yards away. The double load had caused so violent a recoil of his weapon, that he was landed upon his back in a manner more easily imagined than described.

"That was the meanest trick I ever heard of," he declared, scrambling to his feet and picking up his gun. "Blazes! my nose is bleeding. I wonder why it is that I am always more unfortunate than other people?" he groaned, producing a handkerchief and wiping the blood from the injured feature. "I suppose I was brought into the world to show how unlucky a person can be. I'm tired of this. If those fellows don't come back pretty shortly I'll desert my post, that's all. I should like to know if they— Good gracious! what are those wolves doing?"

A confused mass of dark bodies, howling, growling and surging backward and forward over the trap, had attracted his notice. The truth was self-evident. The wolves were devouring the one he had shot.

"Oh, thunder!" ejaculated Adolphus, with increased horror, "if the wretches are so pressed with hunger that they will eat their own men, they will be apt to take a fancy to me next. I believe I won't remain here longer. I'll catch cold if I do."

Without further meditation on the subject he shouldered his rifle, turned on his heel and walked briskly away from the spot. He had gone but a few steps when he became aware that the wolves were following him. Alarmed at this, he struck into a run, and gradually quickened his pace until he was going at the top of his speed. The wolves were now in hot pursuit, creating a terrible din by the clamorous yelps and howls to which they gave vent incessantly. Adolphus made for the Yellowstone, running along the bank of the tributary referred to. He ran as he had never run before, and it was a thousand wonders he did not fall, in his reckless flight over the smooth, glassy surface of the snow. Yet his progress seemed painfully slow to him. He was not ignorant of the fact that his life depended on his fleetness of foot. Little as he knew about the wild beasts of the West, he was sure, from their size, that his pursuers belonged to that dreaded species known as the "mountain wolf," and recalling the numerous stories he had heard Dusky Darrell relate, in which the ferocity of these animals was mentioned, it is no wonder he saw the importance of exerting every effort to get out of their way as quickly as possible.

But his efforts were useless. The wolves were dashing after him in a tumultuous drove, and no human being could have outstripped them. They gained ground at every spring, but Perkins fled on with unabated velocity, his muscles strained almost to bursting, his eyes staring wildly ahead and his coat-tails streaming in the wind.

He soon came in sight of the Yellowstone. He sped forward with renewed hope, intending, as he neared the bank, to swerve abruptly from his course, and follow the river to the cave. But, to his surprise and consternation, he observed that the wolves were spreading out on each side of him, and he could turn neither to the right nor the left! It was a fearful discovery, but there was no time to meditate upon

it. His retreat to the only place of refuge he knew of was cut off, and no choice was left him. He darted straight ahead, and bounded down the snowy embankment to the ice below. Then he dashed madly across the frozen water toward the opposite shore, insanely hoping to reach some place where he should be able to baffle his carnivorous enemies.

He had reached the middle of the river, when he was relieved of a small portion of his coat by the teeth of his pursuers, and at the same instant he struck his foot against a wolf in front, and almost fell. He saw the dark mass of bodies closing around him, and the astounding truth forced itself upon his tortured mind. He must stop and defend himself, or struggle on and be brought down perforce in a twinkling. He chose the former course, though there was no hope in either. Halting suddenly, he stood amid the wolves like a bison at bay. He saw that a desperate conflict on the ice was inevitable. His rifle was empty, but clutching it with both hands close to the muzzle, he began to lay about him in a manner that promised death to any coming within its reach. This had the effect of keeping them off for awhile, but he knew it could not last long.

"Help! help! help!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "In the name of thunder, can't somebody help me? Murder! murder! Hangnation! Help! HELP!"

The clubbed weapon swept swiftly around him in a circle, and he was already nearly exhausted. It struck down two of the assailants, and, although it nearly stunned them, they were pounced upon in that state by their ravenous companions, and quickly dispatched. The wolves grew more and more venturesome, and were evidently becoming aware that the circle described was not absolutely impassable.

It must soon have gone hard with Adolphus, but a singular incident occurred just as the last spark of hope died out. The terrible din that had hitherto filled the air, suddenly ceased, and some great fear seemed to have fallen upon the wolves. With a chorus of sharp yelps, they scampered away pell-mell toward the eastern shore, leaving Adolphus standing there alone and unharmed! In an instant not a living object was in sight, and the silence of the grave brooded over the scene.

"Good-by!" yelled Adolphus, "I'll try and be at home next time you call. Demme! it was lucky for them they left when they did," he added, in a lower tone. "I had just made up my mind to slaughter the whole pack of them, when they—"

The sentence was cut short by a deep, threatening growl near by, and with blanched face Perkins saw that another wild animal was approaching. It was a huge, cumbersome body, coming across the river with heavy, shuffling tread, and he instantly recognized it as a monstrous grizzly bear. It was the approach of this brute that had frightened the wolves away, and the thrill of joy that had pervaded his being at their departure, was now changed to sickly terror.

He grew desperate, and resolved to shoot the bear. His rifle was empty, but he thought he would have time to load it; so he hurriedly proceeded to ram home a heavy charge. Before this operation was more than half finished, the bear halted a few feet away and stood glaring ferociously at him. The outlines of his colossal form were plainly seen in the moonlight, and the small glittering eyes resembled coals of fire. Adolphus commanded him to stand still until he should complete the loading of his rifle, and, strangely enough, he was obeyed. He was soon ready, and aiming full at the face of the bear, he fired. He heard a roar of pain, but as the smoke lifted, was astonished to see the brute still standing there, his mouth wide open, and his long red tongue hanging out.

The idea of another struggle for life was intolerable, and rather than risk it Adolphus resolved to take to his heels. He whirled round for that purpose, but before he could take a step, the report of another rifle broke the stillness of the night. The bear roared again with pain, and gazed about him as if to ascertain who had fired this second shot.

Adolphus, knowing that help was at hand, did the same. His heart bounded with joy as he saw the forms of two men coming swiftly toward him, and he shouted:

"Come on, Darrell! Come on, Rathburn! If you want to take a hand in this, you'd better hurry before I kill him!"

The forms came bounding on, and the infuriated grizzly plunged forward to meet them, the blood flowing freely from his wounds.

Perkins watched them now in breathless suspense. He knew a fearful struggle was at hand. He saw gleaming knives in the hands of the two men, and saw that they were bent upon killing the bear, or suffering themselves. The parties met, and began a lively contest. The maddened brute flew at his two-legged foes, as if he would tear them to pieces, but they leaped nimbly around him, and while they kept clear of his teeth and claws, they occasionally found an opportunity to plunge their knives into his shaggy sides. For a short time the fight was carried on in this manner, and then the combatants mingled together and rolled over on the ice. There was a snapping, and snarling, and growling from the brute as they tumbled about, frequently mingled with a yell from his human adversaries. In a few moments the bear, with a dying groan ceased his efforts and lay motionless in death. The two men sprung to their feet with shouts of exultation.

"That's it, boys—give it to him!" cried Perkins, and, now that the danger was over, he drew his own knife and leaped forward to participate in the contest. With ready courage he buried the long blade twice in the dead body, and then coolly wiped it on the hairy hide of his (?) victim.

"That ends his game. He'll never trouble me again, that's certain, for I presume he has found out by this time that it isn't safe to provoke my wrath. But, I say, cousin, where the deuce have you and Darrell been— Hangnation!"

No wonder this ejaculation burst from his lips—no wonder he dropped his knife and started back, with pallid face and staring eyes. For the two men standing before him were not Darrell and Rathburn, but two big, painted Indians!

CHAPTER V.

SUSPICIONS AND OBSERVATIONS.

It would be difficult to describe the emotion with which Perkins made this startling discovery. He had no other thought than that the slayers of the grizzly bear were Dusky Darrell and Henry Rathburn, and their sudden transformation into savages was a blow that almost stunned him. Plainly revealed in the moonlight, they stood erect, gazing curiously at him, with their grim, painted visages, gaudy head-dresses, and characteristic apparel.

Perkins was a singular individual, however, and in less than a minute after the first shock, he adjusted his eye-glasses and stared at the dusky twain with all the coolness of a French coxcomb at a fashionable party.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," he said, quietly.

"You go 'long with us," said one of the savages, in low, guttural tones.

"Me go along with you? I beg to be excused, gentlemen—my home lies in an entirely different direction, and I have already stayed out too late. The old woman will dress my hair if I am not in early—indeed she will."

The Indians looked as though they did not understand, and the one who spoke English inquired:

"Who you be?"

"Lieutenant-General Adolphus Perkins, from Boston, Massachusetts. Who are you?"

The spokesman seemed more perplexed than before, and addressed a few words to his companion in his own tongue. Then, espousing the valuable watch-chain the white man wore, he laid his hand upon it and remarked:

"Me take dis."

"Oh, Lord! I couldn't possibly make you a present—"

"Hoo! me take dis."

"Certainly—certainly. I was only making the presentation speech, you know," and Adolphus drew the heavy gold watch from his pocket and handed it, chain and all, to his captors. "Now, gentlemen, I don't deserve thanks for so small an act of benevolence, so don't mention it. Hangnation! how can I ever get that watch back?"

"Take dat, too," grunted the Indian, pointing to the diamond pin on his breast.

"Yes—of course—I forgot that. Here, take it with my best wishes. I wonder if they are going to rob me of everything I possess? If you will examine that pin you will find that I have not cheated you in the least. That diamond cost seven million dollars in London, and I give it to you freely. Demnation! would that I had died when I was a baby! If there is anything else you want, don't feel delicate about asking for it."

Adolphus ceased speaking very abruptly, and his face brightened up as if by a magic touch.

Standing as he was, face to face with the savages, he of course could see objects that were not visible to them. Happening to glance over their shoulders, he was surprised and delighted to see two human figures about ten yards behind them, cautiously approaching. There could be no mistake this time—they were Dusky Darrell and Henry Rathburn. He saw their features, and recognized them without the slightest difficulty. They were creeping stealthily toward the savages in the rear.

Adolphus now observed that Darrell was making signs to him. He gesticulated, pointed at his gun and then at the Indians, and then, stooping, patted the ice with his hand. At first Adolphus was at a loss to understand what these signals signified, but he soon saw that his friends wished him to stoop, so that they could shoot his enemies. So, pretending that the act was purely accidental, he made an awkward movement and both feet slipped from under him at once, landing him sprawling on his back. Scarcely had he fallen when there came the simultaneous report of two rifles, and both of the savages, with agonizing yells, fell dead in their tracks.

Perkins made haste to rise, and the trapper and Rathburn bounded upon the scene.

"Come on, Spider—quick!" said the trapper. "Ef we don't git away from hyur as quick as we can, we'll be s'rounded by wolves 'fore we know it. I reckon these carcasses 'll keep the varmints busy till we git home, ef we'll be prudent enough to vamoose at onc't."

"Yes, yes," answered Perkins; "but one of these devils took my watch and breast-pin. Wait till I get them."

"Be quick, then."

He hastily repossessed himself of his valuables, and then the trio hurried away, as they heard the howls of the wolves all around them. They had not gone far when they heard the voracious animals wrangling over the bodies of the Indians and the bear, and the trapper said they would soon be pursued.

But they reached the cave-rock in safety, and crept into its gloomy recesses. They did not close their eyes that night, but started a fire and sat by it until morning. Adolphus spent two or three hours in relating his wonderful adventures; how the wolves had been so unfortunate as to get in his way—how he had chased them to the river—how he had killed the grizzly bear, etc., etc. Darrell and Rathburn, on going to the bear's den, had been somewhat surprised to find that the object of their hunt was not there. They saw signs, however, indicating that the grizzly had been driven from his lair against his will, and this made them suspect that there were other human beings in the vicinity besides themselves. Attracted to the river by the shouts of Perkins and the Indians, they had arrived there, as we have seen, just in time to save the former from death or captivity.

"A memorable bear-hunt, truly," observed Rathburn. "But this thing of finding red-skins in the vicinity is more than I looked for, at present. What do you think of it, Darrell?"

"It don'toller that they live hyurabouts," said Darrell. "I'll wager my ha'r thar homes ain't less nor ten miles away, 'cause they often go furdern that on a huntin' tramp."

"But suppose some of their friends should happen down this way, and find their corpses—would they not suspicion who did the work, and be down upon us?"

"Tain't likely thar bodies 'll be found. Ef they be, the imps 'll suppose the wolves done the mischief."

The next day Adolphus was scarcely able to move about, owing to his immense exertions of the night before, and the bruises he had received from his falls. Where his gun had "kicked" him his nose was swelled to twice its usual size, and somewhat resembled a half-ripe tomato. In a day or two, however, he was himself again, but it was many days before he left off boring his companions by repeated recitals of his thrilling adventure.

The winter passed slowly enough to our friends. Little of excitement, besides what we have recorded, took place during the cold season, and no more Indians, nor more traces of any, were seen. The trapper applied himself assiduously to his vocation, and they did not want for food; and the fuel with which they had stored their cavern was sufficient until more could be procured. Around their evening fire the conversation was much of the time about Myrtle Forrest, the captive, and plans were laid to rescue her when the Indians should come southward again.

But at last the tedious winter wore away,

and the spring thaw set in. The ice-bound Yellowstone and adjoining rivers broke up with a thundering shock like the crash of artillery, and for awhile all was slush and dripping water. The broken ice went booming past the cavern-home for several days, and then all was swept away, and not a vestige of snow or ice was anywhere to be seen. Bright, genial spring has come once more, and the sudden transformation was like the working of magic. The forest donned its winter garb, and echoed with the glad notes of myriads of birds. The earth teemed with vegetation, the streams were alive with flashing fish, while vast droves of buffaloes and horses darkened the prairies.

One clear, warm morning Rathburn stepped forth from the cave, to stroll along the river-bank and enjoy the exhilarating atmosphere. Adolphus was asleep, and Darrell was out on his daily visit to his traps, so he embraced the opportunity of taking an early and solitary walk. At starting he did not intend to be away more than an hour, but, as much to his own surprise as that of his companions, he did not return until high noon. As he once more entered the subterranean abode, the trapper looked at him steadily, and inquired:

"Whar you been, youngster?"

"Only taking a morning walk," he replied, hanging his gun on the wall.

"Purty long walk, warn't it?"

"Rather longer than I intended it should be when I went out. I was so delighted with the prospect that I wandered on and on like one in a beautiful dream, fascinated by the grandeur of scenery, etc. Thus I unconsciously went far beyond my purposed goal."

The trapper again bent his keen gaze upon the young man.

"Did you see any thing?" he asked.

Rathburn gave a slight start.

"Why do you ask?"

"Wal, you look sorter flurried, like, as if you'd seen sumthin', or sumthin' had seen you."

"Yes, I have seen something," said Rathburn, after some hesitation, "but I suspect I will only lay myself open to ridicule by disclosing what I saw. About a quarter of a mile from here I was slowly following the course of the river, when, happening to glance across, I saw a horse standing upon the opposite bank. That is all I saw, but I watched him full ten minutes, and during all that time he was as motionless as a statue, excepting an occasional twitch of his tail. He stood with his side toward me, and turned his head neither to the right nor the left, and once I thought I saw a rein near his mouth, but it might have been a delusion. I hardly know why my suspicions were aroused, but the circumstance seemed very strange to me, and it has not been off my mind since I witnessed it. I thought you would deem my ideas ridiculous, and so determined to say nothing of what I had seen."

"Was the hoss thar when you come back?" asked Darrell with a vacant, thoughtful look.

"No; he had disappeared."

"Maybe 'twas one of our own hosses?"

"I should have known it, had it been. This was a powerful, milk-white animal, and you know none of ours answers to that description."

The trapper offered no reply to this, and no more was said on the subject all that day. Rathburn concluded that his words had made little or no impression upon his friend, and that they were already forgotten.

When the two young men awoke the next morning, Dusky Darrell had disappeared. There was nothing singular in this, as it was a common thing for him to leave while they were yet asleep, but, when hour after hour slipped by and he did not return, it was plain to them that something unusual had occurred to detain him. Noon came, and still the two were alone. They were not uneasy on his account, for they knew he was capable of taking care of himself, but they could not help believing that something unlooked for, even by him, was the cause of his absence.

About the middle of the afternoon he made his appearance. He stepped into their presence as suddenly and quietly as a spirit, and, as he stopped before them, drew a deep breath and dropped the butt of his rifle on the rocky floor with a metallic ring. Then, producing his pipe, he filled and lighted it, and seated himself on a bundle of furs without a word. Observing by the expression of his face that he had learned something of importance, Rathburn inquired:

"What have you seen, Darrell?"

"Heap," was the gruff response.

"Where have you been since morning?"

"Scoutin' round a trifle. See yer, fellers," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth and

looking at them, "this place are goin' to be too hot fur us in less nor a week!"

"Oh, Lord! what's the matter now?" exclaimed Adolphus.

"Injuns," was the brief but expressive reply.

"Good gracious! you haven't seen Indians, I hope?"

"Jist put a stop on that provision-hole of yourn and listen. The long and short of the whole thing are jist this: the Blackfeet have come back to this neighborhood to spend the summer. I come onto thar village right whar I expected to find it, in the same valley I mentioned last fall, you remember. I reckon it numbered 'bout seventy-five lodges, or nearly that many, and the Injuns war swarmin' around 'em like a lot of bees. Once a party of the imps, comin' in from a hunt, passed within a rod of whar I was hid, but they didn't see me."

"Did you see the white captive?" eagerly asked Adolphus.

"See'd a good many squaws strollin' around, but I warn't near enough to tell whether thar was a white one among 'em. I don't count much on findin' the gal among the chaps around hyar, 'cause in five years she mought have passed through the hands of half a dozen tribes, and like as not she's on t'other side of the Rocky Mountains now."

"Thunderation! narrow chance of getting her, I should say."

"Nevertheless, hyur's what's goin' to git her, ef she hain't kicked the bucket. But, hold on; I hain't told you all I learnt. After leavin' here this mornin', I walked straight toward the spot whar you'd see'd the mysterious white hoss, Rathburn, kinder thinkin' ef your s'picious war well founded he'd be thar ag'in to-day. When I reached the place I stopped and looked across the river. Sure's I'm settin' on these pelts, thar stood the critter on t'other bank jist as you had described him. I was somewhat taken aback at this, and I dodged abind a tree to watch. The whole case was soon made clear to me. I see'd sumthin' small and dark right on the hoss's back, not fur from the root of his tail, and I knowed in a minute that it was nothin' less than a red-skin's foot. The cuss war clingin' to the other side of the animal and watchin' this side of the river from under his neck. In a few minutes the Injun riz up on the critter's back and rode away. I don't know whether he laid his peepers on me or not, but I reckon you didn't escape 'em yesterday. The varmints s'picion we're in these parts, ef they don't know it, and 'tain't goin' to be a great while afore they come on us."

"Then, something should be done," said Adolphus, nervously.

"Yer right thar, ef you never war afore, Spider. Sumthin' must be did, and that purty suddint."

"Have you formed any plans?" asked Rathburn.

"Wal, I've sorter hit on a course of proceedin'. I'm goin' round this evenin' and take in the traps, for ef the skunks should stumble onto one of them, they wouldn't need any more evidence that we're around. To-morrow we'll occupy ourselves spyin' round the village, 'cause the first p'int is to find out if the white gal are with this tribe, and to git an interview with her ef she be. Ef fortune favors us, mayhap we'll be ready to tramp by to-morrow night."

"Why need we remain here longer, cousin?" ventured Adolphus, turning to Rathburn.

"Ef you fellers wants to go now, while you can, Dusky Darrell offers no 'jections. I started after that female alone, and I reckon I don't need any help, though you mought be of some service to me ef you'd stay. Howsumever, you run the risk of leavin' yer top-knots in these parts ef you stays another day, and I can't blame you ef you cut sticks fur the States this very hour."

"I shall remain here as long as you do," said Rathburn, firmly, "and I trust my cousin is not weak enough to decide differently."

"Pshaw! what's the use talking that way?" said Adolphus. "You should have known that I was not in earnest. Of course I want to see this white captive before I leave this section."

"Wal, that settles it, then. Ef you're bound to see the game through, Dusky Darrell's what's goin' to stick to you as long as you don't show the white feather."

The trapper proposed that both of his companions should accompany him on his trip after the traps. Shortly after sunset they entered the canoe, and rowed about among the small runs, visiting every trap and taking them all into the boat. They saw no signs of Indians, and returned unmolested to the cave.

Then the saddles, bridles and furs were brought forth and placed in the canoe. These, under cover of darkness, were taken across the river. They found their horses undisturbed, saddled them and hitched them in a deep ravine, ready for use at a moment's notice.

Having thus made every preparation for flight, they went back to the cave to obtain what sleep and rest they could, before braving the dangers the morrow would bring forth.

"Sleep well to-night, boys," said Darrell, as he stretched himself on the floor, "cause, ef I ain't powerful mistook, we'll never sleep in this place ag'in. Something is going to be did to-morrow, that's sartin."

CHAPTER VI.

ADOLPHUS SEES A VISION AND PERFORMS A FEAT.

In the morning the three adventurers equipped themselves for a general scouting expedition, and set out bright and early. They left nothing of value at the cave, for it was not their intention to return thither, since Darrell asserted that it would be dangerous to do so. After proceeding a little distance they separated, each choosing his direction, and all shaping their courses toward the Indian village, so as to approach it from opposite points.

This proceeding did not please Adolphus. Solitude, at such a time and place, was not the pleasantest thing he could think of, and he watched after his friends longingly as they walked away on each side of him. When they had disappeared, and he found himself really alone, he dropped into a leisurely gait, determined not to go very near the village, but let the others do what reconnoitering was necessary. It was a clear, radiant morning; the air was filled with the music of numberless birds and purling streams, and the country seemed converted into a Paradise. The atmosphere was pure and exhilarating, and there was a soothing influence in Nature that made Adolphus forgetful of all around. He wandered onward like one in a dream for a full half-hour, when he was considerably startled by a shadow falling upon the ground in front of him. He stopped suddenly and looked back. Not a living thing was to be seen, but there was a slight commotion in the undergrowth, and he knew it was caused by a human being stealthily making off. The discovery that his footsteps were dogged by enemies was not decidedly pleasant to him, and in his alarm he unconsciously quickened his pace. But no more signs of Indians were seen or heard, and his fear soon died out.

Presently he came upon a scene that caused him to halt, and brought from him an exclamation of delight. It was a large, bubbling spring of cold, limpid water, resting like a mirror under a low, mossy embankment, and overshadowed by the wide-spreading branches of a tree. On one side of the spring was a curiously shaped stone, somewhat resembling a chair, cut by the hand of Nature. It promised comfort to any one seeking its embrace, and it looked so inviting that Adolphus could not resist the temptation of resting awhile before going further on his way. Dropping into the natural chair, he hung his hat on his knee and gave himself up to delightful repose. With his head resting in such a position that his face was turned toward the bright blue sky, he dreamily watched the white clouds that flecked it, and the many birds that floated before his vision. The soft breeze fanned his brow, and toyed with his hair and cheek-whiskers, and two or three times he caught himself sinking into a light slumber. Once he was aroused by hearing something that sounded like a footstep near by. He raised his head and listened, but as the sound was not repeated, and nobody was seen, he concluded that his fancy had been at work. But he would not resume his recumbent posture for fear he should commit the mistake of falling asleep.

All at once Adolphus dropped upon his knees by the spring.

"By thunder! why didn't I think of that before?" he muttered. "I haven't seen myself since coming to the western country, and I am sure this is a splendid chance. Why, this is nearly as good as a looking-glass, I declare. It reflects nicely."

He bent over the water as Narcissus bent over the crystal fountain, but, unlike that fabled youth, was not enamored of his own image. On the contrary, judging from the groan of anguish that escaped him, one would suppose he was highly displeased.

"What a picture!" he cried, despondently. "I declare I look like the devil before day! Oh, for a razor, or a pair of scissors, or anything

with which to remove this superfluous beard. It's perfectly awful. Isn't this a pretty plight in which to meet that Myrtle Forrest?"

For several minutes he gazed at his image, as reflected in the spring, examining every feature separately, muttering to himself and lamenting the disfigurement of his beard. All of a sudden a hush fell upon his tongue; his eyes expanded, his hands flew wide open, and his lower jaw dropped as if a weight were on it. The cause of this was no more nor less than another face appearing in the water within a foot or two of his own! He could hardly believe his eyes—and yet for a minute he could not remove them from the apparition. It was plainly reflected in the other side of the spring—a face that might have been compared to that of an angel—white, glowing, beautiful!

With a cry of amazement, Adolphus sprang up and looked about in search of the intruder. Not a soul was visible in any direction. What could it mean? Certainly he had seen the reflection of some person's visage. Where could the person be? He dropped his gaze to the water again. The mysterious face was no longer to be seen; it, too, had vanished.

"Now, this beats any thing I ever saw," said the exquisite, in a cold whisper. "I wonder if that was a spirit I saw? Good gracious! I hope I am not haunted. Maybe somebody has been killed on this spot, and his ghost has returned to see if his bones are buried. Strange, passing strange. I think I could not make a more prudent move than that of getting away from this confounded place as quickly as possible."

At that instant there was a slight rustle in the bushes on the opposite side of the spring. The next moment he recoiled in astonishment, as a human form stepped from behind the bushes and stood revealed before him. He dashed his hand across his face, as if to clear his sight, and then took a closer look at the apparition. What a vision met his gaze! It was so dazzling, so radiantly beautiful, and withal so unexpected, that he at once became motionless, speechless and almost breathless.

On the margin of the spring stood a being who, at such a place, was truly wonderful to behold. She was arrayed in the wild, fanciful garb worn by the Indians of that region, adorned by a glittering profusion of beads, trinkets and fringe. A crown of eagle-feathers gave her the appearance of a princess, and a light scarlet mantle, open in front and thrown back, revealed a dress that had been made with rare taste and neatness. Hair dark and luxuriant fell loosely about her shoulders and shapely form, and the eyes were deep black and burning in their gaze. The cheeks were soft and smooth as velvet, and tinged with richest hue of the rose, while the lips resembled twin cherries in their crimson beauty.

No wonder Adolphus was transfixed with amazement and fascination. He thought this was the brightest vision that had ever crossed his path, and if there was rudeness in the stare he bestowed upon it, he was not blamable. He noticed the faultless symmetry of the full, swelling form, and was enchanted by the extraordinary beauty of the fine, glowing face.

"Who are you?" slowly asked the strange being.

Adolphus started as if struck, as the low, clear voice fell like a strain of music upon his ear. The next moment he was ashamed of the act, and with a forced cough he replied:

"Me?—ah!—ahem!—I'm Governor Adolphus Perkins, of the State of Massachusetts, at your service. You will please pardon my impoliteness in staring at you so rudely, but I was really so astounded by your sudden and unexpected appearance—"

He paused as he observed a look of perplexity on the girl's countenance. It was evident that she did not comprehend. In a more distinct voice he resumed:

"It is truly astonishing, madam, to meet one of your color in this outlandish region. Since I have given you my name, will you have the kindness to favor me with yours?"

"I am Myrtle Forrest," she replied, simply.

"Just as I supposed. I might have known it was you."

The dark eyes dilated at this, and became fixed upon the speaker with a look that seemed to burn into his very soul.

"You speak as if you know me," she said, in astonishment. "You are a stranger to me. I never saw you nor heard your name until this minute. Explain."

"I do not claim to know you. I have merely heard of you."

"Heard of me? When, and from what

source? I have no friends among the pale-faces, and nobody except the Indians knows of my existence."

"That is just, where you are wrong, fair lady. I guess you have more friends than you imagine, and there are a large number of white people who know of your existence."

Myrtle Forrest looked incredulous, and stared at Adolphus as though she thought him insane. Then she pressed her hand to her forehead, and seemed to doubt her own sanity.

"This is marvelous," she murmured. "You heard of me before coming here—I do not know you—many people know that such a person as I live among the Indians of the North-west—Explain, if you can, how it is so?"

Adolphus stepped around the edge of the spring, to the side on which the girl stood, and rejoined:

"Myrtle, I did not expect to meet you here to-day, but, having previously been assured that you were in this part of the country, my pleasure now is greater than my surprise. Believe me, fair Myrtle, my sole object in braving the dangers of this wilderness, is to rescue you from the heathens and take you home."

"Oh! why have you done this? I can not go with you! I have no friend nor relatives—"

"Stop, fair one, and hear me through. Do you remember an individual named, Dusky Darrell?"

The girl seemed to reflect.

"A trapper, who was here five years ago," added Perkins.

Her face instantly brightened up.

"I remember him," she said. "He was a good, kind man, and the savages found out that he was on their grounds. Dusky Darrell—yes, that was his name. The fury of the Indians was great when they found him out, and he was such a good man that I thank Heaven that I was instrumental in saving his life."

"Well," continued Perkins, trying to stand in a graceful attitude, "he's the individual who spread the story of you and your captivity. He went down to Missouri after effecting his escape, and I guess he told everybody he met about you. Somehow or other, a lady living in St. Louis got wind of the—"

"First tell me," interrupted the beautiful girl, "if you are alone here? Did not this Dusky Darrell accompany you?"

"Oh, yes! Darrell and another fellow are hereabouts. I prevailed on them to come with me, you know."

She clasped her hands with a look of intense pain.

"I charged him never to venture back here. Oh! I fear you will all be killed. I told him besides that I could never consent to leave my captors. Among them I will live and die."

"But, look here, my fair friend; I can impart to you something that will cause you to change your mind—"

"Sh!"

Myrtle Forrest raised one small, white hand as a token of silence, and bent her head as if listening. Then, in a hurried, excited way, she grasped his arm and whispered:

"I must leave you—somebody is coming this way. Go, get your companions, and fly for your lives, for the Indians have found you out and will murder you. They know where your cave is, and will surround it to-night! I can not go with you—I am a willing captive, and will end my days here. I thank you more than I can tell, for your disinterested efforts in my behalf, but I can not otherwise reward you. Go! and as you value your lives don't let the grass grow under your feet. If you fail, I shall ever blame myself for it."

With this, and a slight wave of the hand, she turned suddenly and vanished in the woods.

Left alone, Adolphus stood motionless in his tracks, half bewildered and wholly vexed. The fair being was gone—in all probability would not be seen again—and he had not told her that her mother was living. Should he pursue her? No; by doing that he might run into danger, as he had reason to believe the Indian village was not far away.

While thus cogitating he was startled by a crashing in the woods above him. He now remembered that the girl had said some one was coming that way, and a sense of his peril rushed upon him. The remembrance came too late. Before he could move a step, the bushes at the top of the knoll parted, and an Indian bounded down into the hollow, landing directly in front of Adolphus! At sight of each other both recoiled, and stood for a minute gazing in silence. Adolphus saw that he had a huge, muscular enemy to deal with, and he felt his blood growing cold, as he noticed the bale-

ful glitter in the small, snaky eyes. He saw the sinewy fingers slowly close around the horn handle of a formidable-looking knife. He saw the knife slyly drawn from the belt, and he knew the time had come when he must "do or die." He compressed his lips and prepared to make an effort for life. Drawing back a step or two, he made a sudden plunge forward, ducking his head low and thrusting it between the legs of the savage. Then, encircling both legs with his arms, he exerted all his strength and lifted his adversary from the ground, hurling him headlong over his back!

Trembling with excitement, and the exertion he had been compelled to undergo to accomplish this feat, Adolphus turned to observe the result. He beheld a spectacle so unlooked for and sickening, that he recoiled in surprise and horror. The savage, in tumbling over, had fallen head-first into the spring, striking his skull upon the sharp edge of a stone in the bottom, and rendering him at once insensible! There he lay on his breast, his head and shoulders buried in the water, the crimson-tinted bubbles coming to the surface, and the whole spring rapidly becoming dyed with the wretch's blood. With a shudder Perkins turned away, picked up his rifle and hurriedly left the spot. Unaccustomed, as he was, to the presence of death, especially in so revolting a form, he was sickened by the sight of his victim; but he did not forget to render up thanks for his own fortunate escape.

He did not proceed in the direction of the village but struck off in another course, hoping to come across his friends, that he might tell them there was no further necessity of looking for the white captive.

He had walked about a half-mile, and was moving on still, when he heard a rustle in some bushes near by. Before he could look around a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and Dusky Darrell stood beside him.

"Hello, Spider! Whar you goin'?" he demanded, gruffly.

"Hangnation! what's the use of scaring a feller to death?" faltered Perkins, looking up in his face. "I thought you were an Indian, or something else."

"Whar you trampin' to?" asked the trapper again.

"Nowhere, particularly; I am trying to find you, that's all. The fact is, I met with a little adventure, about a half-mile or so from here, by which I became assured that no good would come of spying around the valley. But, where is Rathburn?"

"Hain't see'd him since we parted. You said sumthin' 'bout an adventure—what war it?"

"See here, Darrell; dem'd if I haven't seen the beautiful maiden we're hunting for, and had an interview with her."

"Hey! You don't mean it, Spider?"

The trapper clutched his arm, and looked sharply at him.

"True as the sun shines above us!" asseverated Perkins, and thereupon he hurriedly related the particulars of his interview with Myrtle Forrest. Darrell's brow darkened.

"And you didn't tell her as how her mother war alive, after all? Now, why didn't you? Ef you'd done that we'd be miles away from hyur before nightfall."

"I didn't get a chance to tell her. The words were on my tongue when a big Indian came along, and she run like blazes so he wouldn't see us talking. I killed the Indian, too, after she had gone. I flung him into a spring head-foremost, and dashed his brains out on the stones."

"Did you leave his body layin' thar?"

"Certainly."

"His friends 'll see it, and know who done it. But, I reckon it's all the same ef they does, 'cause they knows we're circ'latin' in this district anyway, and I s'pose they're countin' on havin' some tall times this very night. Did the gal say any thing 'bout our presence here bein' diskivered?"

"Oh Lord, yes. She said the red-skins were going to come down on us to-night, while we're asleep in the cave, and scalp all of us."

"Ruther guess they won't," chuckled Darrell, "fur they won't find us thar. A good lot of the imps will jine in the attack on our home, and while they're away I'll jist step over to thar lodges and see ef I can't git hold of that female."

"I'm uneasy about my cousin," said Perkins. "His mother told me to take care of Lim, and I'm afraid he is in trouble."

"Wagh! you needn't have fear fur him. He'll turn up all right, or I miss my guess. Recollect we was to meet down by the river

whar the big elm leans over the water, 'bout the hour of noon. It's nigh onto that time now, and I guess we'd better be totin' off in that direction, ef we want to see the boy."

Without more words, they shouldered their rifles and made their way toward the appointed place of meeting, on the Yellowstone.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE RAVINE.

UPON arriving at the river they found Rathburn sitting under a large elm tree, awaiting them. He reported his success, or rather failure, in a few words. He had learned nothing, and on three several occasions had well-nigh been discovered by parties of Indian hunters. He was speedily made acquainted with the experience of Perkins, and the chagrin he felt at his own disappointment was dispelled by the pleasure of knowing that one of the party had actually seen and conversed with the fair captive whom they were there to find.

"I am glad she is found at last," he said, "but am sorry you let her slip out of your hands. The peril of our position is momentarily growing greater, and if we tarry much longer I fear we will be unable to escape the meshes. Is she a very good-looking girl, Perkins?"

"Good looking!" echoed Perkins. "Thunderation! she's a perfect beauty. Did you ever see an angel? She's one! She looked like a queen, in her dress of many colors and abundance of flashing adornments. I have decided irrevocably to marry her."

"Indeed? I fear your are counting your chickens before they are hatched."

"What! do you think we shall fail to rescue her from the heathens? Why, bless you, man, I'll wade through blood knee-deep but I'll get her. I've killed two Indians since coming into this part of the country, and that isn't a preface of what I intend to do before leaving. They will soon know that Mr. Perkins is around."

"Well, Darrell, what shall we do now?" inquired Rathburn, turning to the trapper, who was staring thoughtfully into the water.

"The first thing to do," he replied, slowly, "are to cross the river and see to our hosses. Ef they hain't been disturbed by the cussed Blackfeet we may jist consider ourselves lucky, fur the imps are roamin' everywhar, and the probability is that they'll run afoul of the animals."

"What shall we do over there?"

"Lay thar till night, and watch the hosses. I calc'late it's the safest side of the river fur us, anyway."

"Shall you do any thing to-night?"

"I'm goin' to do sumthin', or try it so hard that we'll have to up stakes and git, to save our ha'r. Thar's no use tryin' to do any thing now afore dark, but with the darkness comes business. We'll cross the river, hide ourselves in the ravine whar the critters are, and when the proper time comes I'll leave you thar and sail forth. A big gang of the red-skins will be prowlin' round the cave 'bout that time, tryin' to ketch us nappin', and while they're at that I'll be sneakin' round thar village after the gal. Jist wait hyur till I come back."

Darrell wheeled abruptly and glided away as noiselessly as a serpent, soon vanishing amid the thick undergrowth that lined the shore at this point. Ten minutes later he reappeared, coming down the river in the canoe, running along as close to the land as possible, and using his paddle cautiously. As he shot up alongside the spot where his companions were awaiting him, he hastily inquired:

"See'd anybody since I left?"

"No signs of anybody," answered Rathburn.

"Then jump in yer—quick. Our lives ain't worth shucks as long as we stay on this side of the water. I've seen more'n twenty trails to-day, leadin' in every direction, and it's plain as the nose on yer face that they're huntin' fur us."

Rathburn and Perkins took their places in the canoe, and it was headed across the stream. Darrell swept his eyes in a circle around him, before venturing out into the middle of the river and then, with powerful sweeps of the paddle, he made the light vessel dart like a bird toward the opposite side.

In a few moments the canoe grated on the low, sandy shore, and its occupants sprung out. It was then drawn out of the water, and carefully concealed in the recesses of a rock to preclude the possibility of its affording a clew to their whereabouts.

"Keep close, and don't let any thing escape yer peepers," admonished the trapper, as they

hurried across the sandy belt toward the timber.

Darrell led the way deep into the wood, leaving no trail whatever, and cautioning his companions to be as careful as possible in that respect.

They had proceeded thus but a short distance when they came to the ravine where their horses were hid. They found the latter just as they had left them on the preceding evening, securely hitched to trees, and equipped for the homeward journey. Entering the ravine, and finding all quiet there, they arrived at the conclusion that no enemy had stumbled upon that spot, and so they seated themselves on a fallen tree near their horses, and held a long and earnest consultation.

Rathburn expressed a desire to accompany Darrell upon his intended visit to the Indian village, but the latter thought the chances of success would be better if he should go alone. Two men were not required to do the contemplated work, he said, and besides, a second person, by some unforeseen accident, might destroy the whole plan before any thing could be accomplished. Too much depended on a favorable termination of the project to risk any thing unnecessarily. Darrell thought it were better to go alone, and leave Rathburn and Perkins in charge of the animals, that they might have them ready for flight the instant he should return.

While they were conversing, Adolphus considerably startled the others by jumping up all at once, with the exclamation:

"Hello! what's that?"

"What's what?" asked the trapper, looking up.

"What did you see?" inquired Rathburn, observing that his cousin was staring hard at some point directly in front.

"I didn't see any thing," he replied, "but I heard something. Just as you were making a remark, Darrell, I heard a splash in the water right behind that thicket."

A shallow stream, about five feet wide, coursed through the ravine a few yards from where the men were sitting; but a part of it was hidden from view by a dense thicket that grew between them and it. It was this stream and thicket that Adolphus referred to.

"Yes, sir, I heard a splash," he repeated, firmly, "and I believe it was caused by somebody stepping into the water."

"Nonsense; it was nothing more than a twig dropping from a tree," observed Rathburn.

"Demnition! do you mistake me for a fool?" demanded Adolphus.

"Wal, don't blow so much about it, but go and see what sort of a critter made the noise," said Darrell. "Thar mought be an Injun on t'other side of the thicket, and I s'pect we done a keerless trick by settin' down yer 'thout s'archin' close all round. Go see what it is, Spider."

Adolphus hesitated whether to obey the injunction or not. But his hesitation was but of a moment's duration, for he reflected that he was the only one in the party who held that somebody besides themselves was in the vicinity, and he would be stamped as a coward if he refused to prove it. So he put on a fearless air and walked boldly toward the brook, approaching the point from which the suspicious noise had come. He disappeared behind the thicket, and the next minute his voice was heard crying out, in excited tones:

"Come here, fellows; come here! I'll show you conclusive evidence that somebody has been here!"

Darrell and Rathburn hastened to his side. They found him bending over the stream, gazing into the limpid water with eyes dilated to their utmost extent.

"Look at that, will you?" he said, with an air of triumph.

There, sure enough, was a huge moccasin-track in the fine gravel that formed the bed of the stream. There was no mistaking the cause of the impression, and at a single quick glance Dusky Darrell pronounced it the footprint of an Indian.

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Adolphus, exultingly.

"After all, you might have been mistaken," remarked his cousin. "Probably that track was made twenty-four hours ago."

"Bah! I thought you knowed better'n that, youngster," said Darrell. "That track hasn't been made more'n three minutes, and in three more minutes thar won't be a trace of it left. See how fast the gravel's runnin' into it; jist wait, and you'll see how quick it'll fill up."

"True; I did not think of that—"

"Down, boys! Stoop down, quick!" sud-

denly shouted Darrell; and before they could obey him he seized an arm of each and brought them to the ground with more expedition than politeness.

At the same instant the report of a rifle rung out clear and loud, and a bullet whistled by within an inch of Rathburn's face. All looked about to ascertain from what direction the shot had come. They caught sight of a bluish wreath of smoke slowly rising from a clump of bushes on the opposite side of the ravine.

"Good gracious! we are attacked," cried Adolphus, turning pale and crouching behind his friends.

"Look!" exclaimed Darrell, pointing at the bushes mentioned.

An Indian was seen slinking away in a stooping posture, trying in vain to conceal his body. The trapper threw up his rifle, and leveled it at the spot, but before he could cover his mark, the savage darted forward with the quickness of lightning and began to clamber up the steep embankment with the agility of a cat. In a few seconds he disappeared like a flash over the top, and was gone.

"By the everlastin' heaven, that imp mustn't leave hyur alive!" thundered Darrell, through his clinched teeth.

And before the others could guess his intention, he had whipped out his knife and cleared the stream with a single stride! They saw him bounding across the intervening space like an antelope, in hot pursuit of the savage, his body bent down and his huge knife flashing in the sunlight at every jump. They saw him spring up the acclivity with even more nimbleness than the Indian had shown, his wiry figure bending and twisting like that of a panther. He reached the summit of the ascent, and darted out of sight in a twinkling.

"There's a race for life," muttered Rathburn.

"Sure as you live," rejoined Perkins; "but I fear he won't catch the rascal. I was about to give chase myself when he started. I wonder why he wants to kill the fellow, anyway?"

"That's very plain. Suppose we should let him escape and return to his brethren; he would inform them of our whereabouts, and a band of them would be upon us before nightfall. That is why he wishes to slay this one, and for that reason I hope he'll succeed.

"I wonder if that red villain was here when we came?"

"I have no doubt he was concealed in the thicket when we entered the ravine. He had stumbled upon our horses, and was bent on stealing them, I suspect. While we were conversing he endeavored to steal away, but in doing so, stepped in this brook and made the noise that you heard."

"To be sure—to be sure! Haven't I ears? By George! they can't be beaten. I can hear a bed-bug walking on feathers."

"Listen!" exclaimed Rathburn, raising his hand.

As he uttered the word there came a cry, faint and far away, yet fearfully distinct—a chilling, unearthly cry, like the wail of a spirit consigned to eternal misery.

Perkins and Rathburn looked inquiringly at each other.

"Somebody's kicked the bucket," whispered Perkins.

"Yes," rejoined Rathburn, "and it is either Darrell or the Blackfoot, for it came from that direction."

After several minutes of patient waiting, however, all uncertainty was dispelled by the reappearance of Darrell on the opposite side of the gorge. He coolly descended the bank and approached them, chewing his tobacco as unconcerned as if nothing of a serious character had taken place. But, as he came near, they saw blood on his hand and a gory scalp at his girdle.

"You killed him, I presume?" said Adolphus.

"He'll never draw bead on another white man," was the quiet reply. "Hyur's his skullock, and his carcass is lyin' under a log up in the woods, kivered with leaves. Reckon he thought he was a lightnin' runner, and I allow he could run somewhat, but he stood no chance with this beaver at his heels."

"He was a Blackfoot, of course?"

"Sartinly; and ef he had got back home with his knowledge of our lurkin'-place, we would have been obliged to git up and git, without waitin' fur the gal. We'll have to be more keerful now, ef we don't want our plan nipped in the bud, and I calc'late that's jist what we don't. We'll lead the hosses into the thicket, whar the eye of a eagle can't see 'em, and then we'll climb a tree."

This was accordingly done. They first looked

carefully about, and made sure that no enemies were secreted near, and then they secured their horses in the densest part of the thicket. After this they ascended a tree, and ensconced themselves in the impenetrable foliage, where they could watch and wait unseen. Dusky Darrell made all the preparations necessary for his night expedition, and he waited anxiously for the time when he was to set out.

Two hours after stationing themselves in the tree, the sun went down, and darkness gathered over the scene. The stars were shut out by black, inky clouds, and a night such as the anxious watchers had longed for, was upon the earth.

As soon as it was fairly dark, Dusky Darrell slid down from his lofty seat, first giving his companions a few directions. He told them particularly that if he did not return before noon of the following day, they were to mount their horses and get out of that part of the country as quickly as possible.

With this he glided away in the direction of the river.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAPPER TO THE RESCUE.

THE trapper entered his canoe, and paddled it swiftly across the Yellowstone. The Blackfoot village was a long distance away, and he knew time was too precious to be wasted. It was a dark night, and a more suitable one for the perilous undertaking in view could not have offered. With his eye bent on the western shore, which was dimly outlined against a patch of gray sky, the trapper rowed rapidly in the direction of it, his trained ear on the alert for sounds of a suspicious nature. Nothing could be heard but the measured dip of his paddle, the rush of the night-wind, and dull roar of the river. The fire of youth leaped to his eyes as he thought of the danger connected with his errand, for danger was something he had reveled in for many years, and to him there was a sort of wild pleasure in being surrounded by it. He loved to steal into the enemy's camp, before their very faces, and outwit them, and the excitement of a hand-to-hand encounter was relished at any time.

At his swift rate of speed, he had hardly thought he was half across the river when the dark, wooded shore loomed up a few yards in front of him. He ran the canoe into a small bayou, and sprung ashore. Without a second's hesitation he then turned his face toward the Indian village, and plunged into the gloomy forest, trailing his rifle and moving with those long, noiseless strides which the hunter or scout unconsciously acquires. The village was not less than two miles away, and fully understanding that much was to be accomplished before morning, he allowed no grass to grow under his feet. But he had not proceeded far when the clear notes of a night bird fell upon his ears, causing him to pause and listen. The call was immediately answered by a similar cry, coming from the direction of the cavern. Darrell put on a broad smile, and moved forward again.

"So they're out on the path a'ready, be they? Wal, they're at liberty to do all the harm they can to the cave, but I reckon the varmints don't s'picion that I'll be prowlin' round thar lodges while they're raisin' thunder about my domicile."

About a half-mile further on he stopped again. This time he jumped backward as if he had stepped on an adder, and quickly crouched down behind a tree. It was well that he did this, for he was scarcely hidden when a number of black figures flitted across his path, so close that he could almost have touched them with his hand. A moment later they had vanished like so many phantoms, and the hunter rose to his feet.

"Let 'em go," he chuckled, "and I'll go t'other way. They'll find out thar mistake sometime or other, but not till they go through a heap sight of stratagems, and maybe they won't l'arn that we ain't in that hole afore to-morrow."

Swiftly, stealthily he went on his way, the wood seeming to grow darker as he proceeded. The moaning of the wind in the tree-tops, and the cries of wild animals, were all that disturbed the night, except a faint signal now and then coming from the direction of the cavern. No more Indians were seen, but several times he halted at the rustle of a leaf, only to discover that it was caused by the wind.

At last the wood grew thinner, and he emerged into a broad, open space on the summit of a hill. Below him, in the valley, he caught sight of several fires, blazing brightly and sending

their volumes of smoke and sparks high into the air. Human figures could be seen moving about them, and gliding swiftly hither and thither, while occasionally the sound of voices drifted up the slope to the ears of the trapper. He knew it was the Blackfoot village nestling there at his feet, and that he had arrived at the scene where the most perilous part of his enterprise was to be enacted.

He did not pause a minute, but stooping till his head was nearly on a level with his knees, he began to move down the slope with all the circumspection possible. He was not ignorant of the hazard he incurred by approaching the village at this time, when few of the Indians had retired to rest, but the very danger involved in the act possessed an attraction for him. He crept nearer to the lodges, moving inch by inch with the greatest stealth and patience. At length he crawled into a deep copse just without the confines of the village, and once under its shelter he paused to watch.

From this point he had a good view of the whole place. A dozen or more fires lighted up the picturesque scene, revealing the rude huts and skin tents that formed the habitations of the savages. Old men and squaws were moving about, and occasionally a lithe, graceful young warrior would appear with a smiling, bright-eyed maiden by his side. A little distance away a number of wrinkled old women were at work over a boiling caldron, and further on was a party of youths, indulging in numerous recreative sports on a wide grass-plot. All of these Darrell saw, but he looked in vain for a white face among those dusky, painted ones. The loud hum of voices, mingled with an occasional shout or peal of laughter, filled the air, but these sounds were unheeded in his search for the captive. She was nowhere in sight. At this time of the evening the entrance to many of the wigwams were open, and the scout was afforded a view of the interior of some of the nearest ones. He saw males and females sitting, reclining, or standing within them; but they were all savages. Nothing disheartened, he was about to creep out of the copse, and steal round to the other side of the village, when an incident occurred that caused him to settle back in his position and resume his watch.

The lodge nearest his covert had hitherto been closed, so that no part of the interior could be seen from the outside, and for this reason he had paid little attention to it. But just as he decided to leave the spot, the blanket door of this abode was swept aside, and somebody came out. He glanced eagerly at the person, with a hope that it was she for whom he was hunting, but he was disappointed. It was only a withered, weazen-faced old hag, bent with age and leaning upon a stout staff to support her feeble frame. She hobbled out into the open air, and at the same time seemed talking to somebody inside. The next moment a second person appeared in the entrance, where she stood conversing with the old squaw. Darrell leaned forward and gazed sharply at this new arrival. His heart throbbed faster than its wont and the cloud lifted from his countenance, as he recognized her. It was Myrtle Forrest—he knew it was no other, and yet this was the first time he had seen her for five years! He remembered how lovely he had thought her at the age of fourteen, but the ripened beauty that he now looked upon was greater than that of her childhood. He saw her standing there in the opening, with the light from one of the fires outside falling upon her, and he would have sworn she was related to the fine lady he had seen in Missouri.

He watched the two women as they stood in the doorway conversing until they parted. The old hag limped away, and the girl turned on her heel and disappeared within. Now was the time to act. With a brightening visage, Darrell wormed himself out of the copse and crept toward the lodge. He supposed the captive and the hag lived there together, and as the latter had just gone away, it was to be hoped that he would find the girl alone. There was necessity of haste, as it was already growing late, and the squaw would, in all probability, soon return. He made a slight *detour*, and approached the rear of the lodge. Upon reaching it, he paused and listened for a few moments, and then drawing his knife he cautiously cut a hole in the thick bear-hide. Placing his eyes to this he looked in. There was a fire in the center of the apartment, and by its light he was enabled to see the captive reclining on a couch of furs.

She was alone. His mind was made up on the instant. He quickly applied his knife again to the skin, making the aperture large enough to admit his body; and then he fearlessly but

cautiously stepped within. Myrtle raised her head and saw him. She started to her feet at sight of his strange face, and a scream trembled on her lips. But it did not escape her; he raised his hand to enjoin silence, and she instantly seemed to master her fright. Still it was evident that she was not free from surprise and alarm.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" she asked, softly.

"Don't you know me?" he asked, in turn, with a pleasant smile.

She fixed those dark, burning eyes upon him, and was apparently studying his countenance. Then she gave a slight start, and clasped her hands.

"You are Darrell, the trapper," she exclaimed.

"That's jist who I am, little 'un," he replied. "I'm the very chap that you once warned of danger, 'bout five years back."

"Oh! why are you here?"

"I'm hyur after you."

An expression of pain and vexation appeared on the girl's face. Then she glanced uneasily toward the entrance, as though she feared the approach of some one.

"Leave me—fly for your life!" she cried, hurriedly, laying her hand on his arm and looking up at him beseechingly. "Go, before you are discovered and killed. Do not ask me to go with you, for I told you when first we met that I should never return to my people. This morning I told one of your friends the same thing, and you risk your life unnecessarily by venturing here to-night. The Indians have discovered your retreat, and if they find you they will kill you. Go, or you will be seen. Me-tan-go-we, the squaw who occupies this lodge with me, will return in a minute. If she sees you, you are lost. If you would live, you must leave the country at once."

"See yer, my little beaver, you must go with me," said Darrell, firmly.

"I cannot," she expostulated. "You will not force me to leave all the friends I have on earth—you are too good to do that. I have no acquaintances among the pale-faces—"

"Stop, and listen to me," interposed Darrell. "Ef I ain't mistook, you used to have a mother?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, in a voice of touching sadness; "and a father, too; but they are both gone now. They were killed at the time I was taken captive. I told you the story at our first meeting, I think."

"Ain't it likely that thar lives war saved somehow?"

The girl looked at him steadily.

"Why do you ask?" she demanded, huskily.

"Child, your mother warn't killed—she's livin' now!"

"Good Heaven! what do I hear?"

"Listen, child," said the trapper, gently. "I've seen yer mother. She lives in St. Louis, and as fine a woman as I ever see'd. When I went down to Missouri, five years ago, I told a lot of chaps 'bout you, and how you saved me from the Injuns, and somehow the story reached the ear of yer mother. I met her last year, and she axed me a heap of questions 'bout you, and cried all the time she war talkin'. She told me of the massakree—how she had 'scaped, how her husband had gone under, and how she thought you was dead, too. She said she couldn't live without you, now that she knowed you was alive, and begged me come up hyur after you. Wal, I didn't refuse, and hyur I am. Will you leave the Injuns now?"

"Oh! is this true?" gasped Myrtle, seizing one of his hands in both of hers, and turning pale as death with her sudden and terrible emotion.

"True as preachin', every word on't," he rejoined.

"Then I will return with you. I already feel a loathing of this place, knowing that my dearest relative lives! Mother—dear, dear mother—I will fly to thee! But I fear for you, my friend. If you are seen by the savages, you will surely be killed. Is this reality? Yes—oh! yes—I have heard you aright, and I know you speak truly. Hist! Me-tan-go-we is coming," she added, in a startled whisper.

Both listened. True enough, the irregular footsteps of the old squaw sounded outside.

"Fly!" whispered Myrtle, pushing the trapper toward the rear of the lodge. "If you are seen here, all is lost. Go, quick! Conceal yourself near by, and wait till I come out."

Dusky Darrell waited to hear no more, but leaped through the aperture by which he had entered, and was again out in the darkness.

He glanced hastily about. Nobody was in

sight, and it was evident that he had not been discovered in his bold enterprise. He observed that the fires were growing low, and that most of the Indians had retired within their wigwams. It was growing late.

Well satisfied with his success thus far, Darrell only hoped that his good fortune would continue till his purpose was gained. He found a suitable hiding-place near the lodge, and there lay in wait for the girl. His greatest anxiety now was concerning Rathburn and Perkins. He believed there were Indians on the other side of the river, and he knew if his companions and the horses were found by them, all was lost.

He was allowed little time to reflect on this topic. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed after he left the lodge, when he heard voices, and saw two figures approaching. One of them was Myrtle Forrest, but he was somewhat surprised when he saw that she was accompanied by the aged squaw. They came slowly forward, and passed within a dozen feet of where he lay, conversing busily as they went. He concluded that the girl had mentioned her intention of walking out, that the Indian woman had insisted upon going with her, and that she had not absolutely refused for fear of exciting suspicion. They left the village entirely, and soon began to ascend the long slope that led out of the valley. Darrell rose to his feet and stole after them, determined to separate them, if to do so he should be compelled to knock the hag down. He followed them stealthily, keeping at a proper distance, yet near enough to distinguish their forms. No one seemed to have noticed their departure from the village; if it had been observed, it was regarded as nothing unusual.

Presently the two women paused on the side of the hill. The hunter did the same, stooping quickly lest he be seen. He saw that they had come upon a large spring, from which the Blackfeet procured all the water that was used by them, and it was at once plain to him why they had taken this course. They had come after water, or pretended to do so.

They had no sooner stopped, than the old hag turned about and began to retrace her steps, leaving the young girl alone. No Darrell this was a singular proceeding, and he was at a loss to understand its meaning. He saw the woman coming directly toward him, and half-believed he was discovered; but he cautiously crept out of her way, and hugged the ground closely, to let her pass. She came straight on, and hobbled by within arm's length of him, moving on down the hillside after she had passed.

He waited until she was well gone, and then leaping to his feet he hastened to the spring, where Myrtle was awaiting him.

"Is that you, my friend?" she faltered, as he approached.

"It's me, little 'un—don't be afeard," he answered, cheerfully; "and I am ready to be off, too."

"Come, then, and in the name of Heaven let us waste no time! I have dispatched Me-tan-go-we to the lodge after a cup, in order to get rid of her. She will be back here soon, and finding me missing, will give the alarm. Time was never more precious. Here; take my hand and let us run, and do not be afraid of tiring me, for I shall not get tired."

Darrell took the proffered hand, and together they started off on a rapid run toward the distant river.

"But what you cryin' 'bout?" he asked, in astonishment, feeling her hand trembling in his, and observing that she was quietly weeping.

"Oh, I can't help it!" she sobbed.

"But what's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing—only the anticipation of meeting my dear mother once more on earth! God grant that it may be so!"

Darrell said no more. He understood that her mingled joy and fear were overwhelming, and he knew no harm could come of letting her weep; so he did not attempt to quiet her. After a while, however, she mastered her emotion, and was again calm.

As they entered the forest they abated their pace, but kept steadily on. They dashed through bushes and briars, across streams and swamps, over hills and through dales—constantly, hastily, on through the deep gloom that enshrouded them. Myrtle was nimble of foot, and ran with such untiring elasticity and swiftness that her stalwart companion was surprised. They momentarily expected to hear the cries of the savages behind them, but none was heard as yet.

Presently, they were startled by hearing

other footsteps besides their own! At first they thought this the work of their imagination, but, as the sound grew more and more distinct, there could be no doubt that some one was running in the same direction they were. The footsteps were not behind them, but off to one side, and seemed gradually getting ahead of them. The unseen pursuer seemed bent upon getting in front, so as to intercept them, and from the rate at which he was going it was easy to guess that he would accomplish his purpose. Darrell drew his knife from his belt, and clutched it firmly. Then he gave the girl a signal, and they both halted suddenly and stood still in their tracks, faintly hoping their invisible foe would run on and leave them unmolested.

But as soon as they stopped a suppressed "ugh!" was heard, and the next instant an Indian glided like a shadow before their eyes, and stood in front of them! Darrell did not wait an instant. With set teeth and gleaming orbs, he sprang upon the Indian like an infuriated tiger. There was a brief struggle, and the combatants fell to the ground locked in a deadly embrace. Then there arose a prolonged, howling shriek, so loud that it might have been heard miles away, and springing to his feet, Darrell thrust his dripping knife into his belt.

"Come on, Myrtle," he said, seizing her by the arm and leading her. "The time fur tall runnin' has come."

They leaped over the dead body of the Blackfoot, and continued their flight. The death-yell of the red-skin was answered by a series of wild whoops, far away toward the cave; and then yell upon yell, and howl upon howl, came from the direction of the village!

"Now comes the pursuit," murmured the girl.

"No doubt on't," answered the trapper. "That varmint's screech war more'n I bargained fur. I don't see how he happened to be follerin' us alone, onless he see'd us start and thought he'd take the honor of capturin' us all by hisself."

"Listen!" she interrupted; "isn't that the roar of the river?"

"It is—we're almost thar."

They dashed on, and in a few minutes reached the river. They emerged from the wood, and saw the glistening water in front of them, and the hunter glanced quickly about to see where they were.

They turned and ran along the bank about a furlong, and found the canoe in the little bayou where Darrell had left it. Here the latter hesitated long enough to give vent to a shrill whistle, as a signal for Rathburn to get the horses in readiness for flight. Then, seizing the girl in his arms, he placed her in the canoe, jumped in behind her, snatched up the paddle and pushed out upon the river.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

THE first cries of the Indians had reached the ears of Rathburn and Perkins in the ravine, and they had instinctively guessed that they were caused by the flight of the captive with Darrell. They knew what was expected of them, and acted accordingly.

They led the horses out of the ravine down to the river, where they held them ready to be used as soon as their friends should appear. They had stationed themselves at a point where they knew Darrell would land. A low, sandy tract formed the shore here, and the dark, glistening water swept by close to their feet. Before they had been there five minutes the trapper's shrill whistle came from the opposite shore, echoing and re-echoing through the forest, and at last dying away like a faint wail in the distance. They knew the meaning of this, but the signal was not needed. The animals were ready to be mounted at any moment, and no further preparations were to be made.

The whoops and howls of the savages could still be heard behind the fugitives, loud and clamorous, and escape seemed almost an impossibility.

In an incredibly short space of time after the trapper's whistle had sounded, the two adventurers heard the rapid dip—dip—dip, of a paddle in the water. Surprised at the wonderful speed with which he had crossed the river, they bent forward, half doubting, to catch a glimpse of the vessel. A canoe loomed up in the darkness, coming swiftly toward them. Straining their eyes through the gloom, they saw that it had three occupants, instead of two, as they supposed it would have. Rathburn was not a little astonished at this, but Adolphus with his

usual short-sightedness, regarded it as nothing singular; he thoughtlessly called out:

"Come on, Dusky, right this way—"

Rathburn clapped his hand over his cousin's mouth before another word could escape it.

"Fool!" he whispered, close to the startled fellow's ear. "That is not our friend, but three Indians!"

Such was really the case. The occupants of the canoe were now so near that their shorn heads and waving plumes were detected, and there could not be the shadow of a doubt that they were savages. In all probability they were a part of the pursuers, who had got ahead of Darrell, and whose design was to intercept him on this side.

But Rathburn's warning came too late. The voice of Adolphus was plainly heard by the savages, who quickly reversed the paddle and stopped the progress of the canoe. They did not dart back into the darkness, but remained stationary where they stopped, and sat as silently as specters, appearing at a loss to comprehend whence the voice had come.

"They don't see us," whispered Rathburn. "The dark background renders us invisible. We must fire into them—there is no alternative. They are only three, and we can kill two. Select your man, and as you value your life don't miss him. Now!"

Both rifles were raised, and aimed at the shadowy trio. Adolphus was growing accustomed to firearms, and as he could already boast of having killed two Indians, he was delighted at the prospect of sending a third into eternity. Rathburn gave the word—there were two jets of flame, two reports, one following close upon the other, and two Indians tumbled headlong out of the canoe, both dead. The third, terrified by the death of his brethren, leaped overboard and began to swim for life, soon vanishing from sight in the darkness.

It had all transpired in a minute. Fearing the sound of firearms would cause the trapper to change his course, Rathburn ran to the water's edge, and shouted:

"Come, Darrell! The coast is clear!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the dip of a paddle was again heard, and the shadowy outlines of another canoe came in sight. This had only two occupants, and as they neared the shore it was seen that they were a male and a female. The two men sprung forward to meet them.

"What you been doin' hyur?" inquired Darrell, jumping out and pulling the craft up on the sand.

"We shot a couple of red-skins, who were trying to intercept you in a canoe," answered Rathburn, leading the animals forward.

"Oh, Lord, yes!" put in Adolphus. "We knocked them head-over-heels clean out of the boat. I tell you it was fun to see the rascals topple over. I hit my man fair in the heart, but cousin isn't so good a marksman as I, and consequently I suppose he didn't—Ah! pardon me—let me assist you."

The exquisite stepped nimbly forward, and politely assisted Myrtle to get out on land.

"This is no time to talk," said Darrell, speaking rapidly. "See yer, youngster"—turning to Rathburn—"you've got the biggest and most powerful boss in the party, so I reckon as how you'll have to take the gal on with you. She hain't got no animal, and in course we can't git her one now. We must start putty suddint, or I'm afraid we won't start at all. Jump on, youngster, and I'll put the little beauty on behind you. Come this way, Myrtle—quick!"

Dusky Darrell lifted the maiden in his strong arms, and placed her upon the bay horse behind Rathburn.

"Hold tight to him now, my little beaver. Don't be afeard to put yer arms around him, for he won't hurt you."

"I say," whispered Adolphus, putting his mouth close to the trapper's ear, "don't you think my horse is the strongest?"

"Bah! it's all yer critter can do to carry you, and thar ain't no more heft in you than thar is in a spider."

With this the trapper vaulted into the saddle, and Adolphus was not slow in following his example.

A moment after, the little party were cantering away on fresh, fleet-footed steeds, and for the first time their minds were comparatively at ease. They were compelled to move more slowly than suited their fancy, while making their way through the dark wood, but the open prairie was not far away, and once upon it they would be able to travel as swiftly as they liked. The clamorous yells of the Blackfeet had ceased,

but a faint whoop was heard now and then on the other side of the river, and numerous signal-calls, such as bird-whistles, wolf-barks and panther-cries, showed that they had not given up the pursuit. But the whites were well mounted, and had strong hopes of effecting their escape, although Darrell's bundle of furs, and Rathburn's beautiful burden might render it impossible to do so, if the pursuit should be kept up day after day.

They soon reached the edge of the timber. A wide stretch of prairie was in front of them, dimly lighted by the newly-risen moon, whose light struggled through the clouds at intervals.

They were about to gallop out upon the plain, when a sheet of fire flashed from the forest on each side, dispelling the gloom like a gleam of lightning, and accompanied by a crash that might be compared to thunder! Bullets whizzed in unpleasant proximity to their persons, one plowing its way through Adolphus's whiskers, and another passing through the mantle worn by Myrtle Forrest.

In a second all was confusion. The horses reared and plunged, and it was with difficulty that the riders kept their seats. Troops of Indians poured from their covert and swarmed around the whites, raising a yell that made the welkin ring with a noise most hideous to hear! One fierce-looking wretch grasped the rein of Darrell's animal and raised his tomahawk preparatory to sinking it into the trapper's brain. But the latter was never to be caught napping. Drawing a huge pistol from his belt, and placing it within an inch of his enemy's face, he discharged it. The savage went down without a groan.

"Dash right through 'em, boys," shouted Darrell. "Thar shooters are empty, and they can't ketch us afoot! Now—whoop!"

Simultaneously the three horses sprung forward, and dashed madly through the crowd of Indians, scattering them right and left! Darrell swung his clubbed rifle round his head, dealing tremendous blows on each side of him and striking two of the assailants to the earth. The next moment they burst out of the wood like a meteor, and found themselves on the open plain with the savages behind them.

Of course the fugitives felt no more fear, for they knew the speed of which their horses were capable could not be equaled by the unmounted savages. Nevertheless, the latter came bounding after them in hot pursuit, as if determined to run down the burdened animals. Their dark forms could be seen coming on at the top of their speed, and their yells of demoniac fury were answered continually by faint whoops in the distance.

"Oh thunder! I can't stand this," cried Adolphus, and giving his pony the rein he darted ahead like an arrow.

"Stop, Perkins!" called Rathburn. "There's no need of hurrying."

"Demnition! I'm no fool!" he shouted back, without abating a jot of the furious rate at which he was going.

At this terrific speed, the affrighted fellow was soon far ahead, and in less time than it takes to tell it swallowed up in the darkness. The clatter of his horse's hoofs grew fainter, and Dusky Darrell indulged in several hearty laughs as he listened to the receding sound.

"Let him go," he said; "he'll fetch up somewhere, purty soon, and we'll be sartin to find him. As fur me, I'm goin' to knock over another red-skin fore I go any furdur."

He half turned in his saddle, and looked back. The savages were gaining ground, and could be distinctly seen in the increasing light. Dropping the reins, he raised his rifle to his shoulder, took quick but sure aim, and fired. The foremost Indian threw up his hands with a shriek of agony, and reeled backward into the arms of his companions. Darrell then took Rathburn's gun and repeated the act, sending another heathen to his eternal rest.

"Come on, youngster; I guess we mought as well put, now," said the trapper, chirruping to his black charger.

They now allowed their horses free rein, and dashed forward at a speed that soon decided the race. The Indians saw that they were spending time and breath uselessly, and turned back.

"Now, for the present, we will be permitted to continue our flight undisturbed," observed Rathburn, as they galloped on.

"If we are again set upon by so great a number, I fear our flight will be ended," said Myrtle.

"True, our escape seems almost a miracle, but there is no danger of running into another ambush. It is singular to me how those In-

dians happened there right in our path. Can you explain it, Darrell?"

"I mought do sich a thing," replied Darrell. "It's plain thar was no chance about it, and thar's only one way to explain it. The gang as attacked us war the same as went to the cave after us in the early part of the night. Thar kumrids at the village signaled to 'em, and so they crossed the river and headed us off."

"That seems very probable," said Rathburn; "but how did they cross the river? Do you think they had canoes handy?"

"Sartinly; you have a heap to larn 'bout Injuns yit, youngster. Ef yer tries to tool a Blackfoot every day in the week you'll soon find him gittin' too 'cute fur you. In course the imps took canoes with 'em on thar trip to the cave. They expected to find us thar, but I s'pose they thought as how we mought retreat across the river, and that they'd better be prepared to foller."

"I saw them leave the village," said Myrtle. "They took two canoes."

By this time it was becoming light. Day was breaking in the east, and the pall of night was slowly lifting from the prairies. The golden light spread and grew brighter and brighter, until the sun appeared above the horizon.

"Wal, the day has come at last," said Darrell, turning in his seat and gazing anxiously back across the wide space they had traversed. "The day has come at last, and still the horizon's clear. The imps hain't in sight yit."

"Probably they have concluded to trouble us no more," said Rathburn.

"You're jist precisely wrong thar. Ef we war alone maybe they wouldn't bother us much, but you'll do well to recollect that the gal are with us. They'll keep up the chase fur days, to git her, and it's likely they'll succeed, too."

"They will not follow us afoot, then."

"Course not—the Blackfeet have plenty horses."

"Do you think we will be overtaken?" asked Myrtle, looking earnestly at the trapper.

"Lord bless you, child, we'll keep you out of thar clutches ef we have to kill our critters to do it," was the kind reply.

"If I should fall into their hands again I am sure they would kill me for attempting to get away."

"Then we must see to it that you don't fall into thar hands," returned Darrell, smiling. "Don't be scar't, my child, fur hyur's one body they'll have to trample under thar feet afore they lays the weight of a finger on you!"

"And here is another," said Rathburn, with fervor.

"Oh! you are both very good and brave, but I would rather give myself up to them than see you do that. I think they will not send a large party after us, and if we could find a good place to stand on the defensive, we might escape the Indians more easily by stopping than by continuing our flight."

"Jist what I war thinkin'," said Darrell.

"Ef we could find stones enough to make breast-works, we mought keep the imps off and even make 'em turn back. We'd need Spider's rifle, though, ef it should come to that. I wonder whar the boy is?"

"Perhaps he is lost," said Rathburn, uneasily.

"Shouldn't wonder; but ef he are, it's his own fault, and we hain't got time to hunt fur him now."

"What is that yonder?" asked Myrtle, pointing ahead. "Maybe that is your friend."

The two men looked toward the point designated by the girl's finger. On a distant swell of the prairie they saw a solitary horseman. He was not in motion, and was apparently awaiting them.

"Smash me, that's Spider, sure's shootin'," asserted Darrell.

Rathburn took off his hat and swung it over his head. The horseman did the same.

This satisfied them that it was indeed Adolphus, and they galloped forward to meet him.

CHAPTER X.

A RIDE WITH THE WIND.

THEY found Adolphus sitting coolly on his pony, stroking its mane and whistling a lively air.

"Good-morning, fair Myrtle—gentlemen, how do you do?"

This he said with a profound bow to the maiden, and a stiff nod to the men, as they joined him.

"Wal, Spider, how do you feel after yer ride?" asked Darrell, with a roguish twinkle in his eye. "Did you think the Injuns war goin' to raise yer ha'r? Wag! wag! I've see'd some purty skeery chaps from 'mong the settlements, but I never see'd one as was more afeard of red-skins than you."

"Why, really, sir, you are laboring under a sad mistake," remonstrated Adolphus. "It was not

because I am afraid of Indians that I went ahead of you—oh, no! not that at all. You see, my horse has been idle all winter, and was naturally restive when I got on his back. Besides that, the savages alarmed him, and it was impossible for me to restrain him. So, you see, the flight was involuntary on my part."

"You're a qua'r coon, Spider, smash me ef you ain't. Thar's no use sayin' you're afeard, fur you'll allers slide out of it in some way nobody else 'u'd ever think of. But that's neither hyur nor thar. This beaver's as hungry as a bee in a band-box, and I s'pose we'd better take time to gobble down a little breakfast 'fore goin' farder."

"Will it not be wasting precious time?"

"Skeercely. We hain't had nothin' to peck at since yesterday mornin', and wouldn't be doin' justice to ourselves if we should ride all day without eatin'. I could stand it, I makes no doubt, but smash me ef you fellers could."

A few minutes after this a fat prairie-chicken was spied, running through the grass within rifle range. Darrell's gun was to his shoulder in a twinkling, and the fowl shot without the least hesitation or compunction. All dismounted then, and their simple breakfast was hastily prepared. Darrell, with his flint and steel, kindled a fire, Rathburn and Myrtle busied themselves in picking and dressing the prairie-chicken, while Adolphus passed the time in watching the beautiful girl and envying his cousin. The chicken was then skewered and roasted, and the little party attacked it with a relish that left nothing but bones at the conclusion of the meal.

Before they were quite ready to resume their journey, Darrell mounted his horse and rode to the summit of a small eminence near by, to see if their enemies were in sight. He shaded his eyes, and swept the horizon. Scarcely had he done so, when he turned to his companions and quietly remarked:

"Stir yer stumps, kumrads. *The Injuns are comin'!*"

As may well be supposed these words had the effect of startling those to whom they were addressed. Springing up, they hastened to their horses and leaped upon their backs. Rathburn took Myrtle up in front of him now, instead of behind, and in less than a minute after the alarm was given they were ready to be off. Once in their saddles, they turned their eyes in the direction Darrell was looking. Far to the northward a tiny cloud of dust was seen, mingled with a number of black, moving specks.

"Them's red-skins, sure's shootin'," asserted Darrell, "and they're comin' after us as fast as they can ride. We must test the mettle of our hosses now, ef we never did afore."

Without further delay, they put spurs to their animals and dashed away. The race was now fairly begun, and there were anxious faces in the little group of adventurers as they hurried the animals to their utmost. Darrell and Rathburn were anxious for the girl alone, and there was a look on the face of each that told plainly what they would do before letting her fall again into the hands of her captors.

It was a beautiful day. The sun rose higher and higher in the blue sky, and north, south and east the gentle undulations of the prairie stretched as far as the eye could reach. To the westward it was broken by a few irregular hills, and broad belts of timber. The fugitives shaped their course almost due south. Mile after mile flew under their feet, and they kept their horses at the top of their speed; but their efforts to distance the pursuers were fruitless. Indeed, it soon became evident that the latter were slowly but surely nearing them, and that sooner or later they would be overtaken! To say this discovery startled them would but feebly express their feelings, but the men generously refrained from showing signs of fear in the presence of the fair one whom they were trying to save.

Henry Rathburn, with the beautiful being sitting in front of him, and his arms almost encircling her waist as he held the reins, experienced a sensation far different from fear or anxiety. His cheeks burned every time those brilliant dark orbs were lifted to his, and when she spoke, the soft music of her voice seemed to echo and re-echo through the inmost recesses of his heart. Once she looked up earnestly, and asked:

"Are they gaining on us?"

Rathburn glanced back before answering; when he did, it was cheerfully and evasively:

"Do not fear—they are far behind."

"I am not much frightened while I have such protectors," said she, "but I believe they will overtake us. Oh, if I could but live to see my dear mother!"

"You shall, Myrtle. There are those here who will die rather than permit an enemy's hand to be laid upon you; and there is one who would be delighted with an opportunity of proving his strong friendship for you."

She stared at him wonderingly, as though at a loss to understand his meaning; but the warm admiration of his look caused her eyes to drop, and the roses to deepen on her cheeks.

Surprised at himself, and withal a little vexed, Rathburn said no more to her, but turned to Darrell and inquired:

"Can you tell the number of our pursuers yet?"

"Thar's jist ten, precisely," was the prompt reply, "and the imps are comin' like lightning, too. See yer, youngster," added the trapper, dropping his voice so that none but Rathburn could hear, "we've got to go through the hardest tussle we've gone through yet, 'fore we go much farder! Thar's no use tryin' to git out of it, 'cause it's goin' to come without fail."

Rathburn made no reply to this, but he thought

much more than he would have ventured to express.

On flew the fugitives, and on came the savages. The excitement of the race became more intense as it became obvious that the latter were gaining on the whites. With frothy mouths and streaming flanks, the frightened steeds dashed onward with the speed of the wind, their riders giving them free rein, and glancing back ever and anon at the pursuing Blackfeet. They were tired, and wet with perspiration, but still plunged madly forward, starting small animals, snakes and birds from their path—sweeping over mile after mile, swiftly, steadily, furiously—thundering on, on, in blind, frantic haste across the wide level plain. Adolphus was frightened into silence. With one eye over his shoulder, and his mouth wide open—with one hand holding his hat, the other his gun, and both clinging to the reins—he cut a ludicrous figure indeed.

The sun reached the zenith—it passed it, and moved slowly on to the western sky, ushering in an afternoon as clear and bright as the morning had been. It was after two o'clock, by Adolphus Perkins's watch, when Dusky Darrell dashed up by Rathburn's side and pointed ahead, saying:

"I s'pose you see whar the perarie comes to an eend, yonder?"

Right in their path, but several miles away, were piles of lofty hills and rugged ledges of rocks, rising abruptly from the plain and extending in a south-westerly course, till they dwindled from sight in the dim distance.

"I see," replied Rathburn. "I have been noticing that rocky range for the last three hours, and thinking we might find a place there suitable for meeting the enemies. But it really seems to move from us as we approach it."

"It ain't more'n an hour's ride from hyur," said Darrell, "and when we git thar we'll find jist sich a place as you speak on."

"You mean a place where we can defend ourselves successfully against the savages?"

"Sartinly; that is, we'll stand a chance of comin' out with our lives, ef we meet 'em in proper style. It's a deep gorge, which we will enter as soon as we reach the nearest ledge. I've been thar 'fore to-day. That range is a spur of the Black Hills, you see, and I used to trap in that vicinity with a chap named Zeph Brown. Zeph war as good a feller as ever peeled a beaver or otter, and I reckon thar never war two chaps as got along better than we did."

"Were you in the gorge you speak of?"

"Reckon we war—we camped thar through the whole season."

The fugitives now permitted their animals to slacken their speed somewhat, as great haste was no longer a necessity. The Blackfeet were still so far behind that none but Darrell's keen vision could determine their number, and the whites might easily reach the mountains in advance of them, even at a moderate pace. They now struck into a swift but gentle canter, the most convenient gait for horse and rider, and one by which both could recover from the fatigue of their long, steady run.

Another hour passed away, and the party neared the cliffs. The Indians were still far away, but coming on with a speed that would soon bring them to the spot that was to witness the crisis. Their gaudy robes could be seen flaunting in the wind, and their plumes rising and falling with the motion of their horses, as they rode promiscuously and rapidly forward.

The whites rounded the corner of a perpendicular cliff, and entered the gorge of which the trapper had spoken. It was a deep, narrow pass, with gigantic rocks towering on either hand, shutting out the sunlight and causing a soft, solemn twilight to pervade it during the day. The fugitives drew their horses into a walk, and rode into the pass slowly.

"By thunder! this is awful still and solemn, isn't it?" said Adolphus, staring about and above him in blank amazement.

"Sorter," answered the trapper; "and, mind you, Spider, that 'r jist the way the red-skins must find it when they come in. Ef you makes any sort of a noise at all, afore I gives the word, smash me ef I don't pull yer ear."

They had not proceeded twenty yards after entering the gorge, when Darrell suddenly drew rein, with a jerk so violent that his horse was thrown back on its haunches.

"Halt!" he said, to the others. "Don't move a step farder! This is the blindest move I ever made!"

"What's the matter?" asked the others, in a breath.

"Look at that, and ax no questions."

He pointed at the ground in front of them. The remains of a fire were there. It had been scattered in every direction, probably within the minute, and there was nothing left of it but ashes, a bed of live coals and few pieces of partly-consumed fuel. Beside this, there were other traces of human presence there, consisting of numerous footprints, a knife sticking in the ground, and several bones and pieces of meat strewn about. Beyond a doubt, a party had "nooned" there, and it was more than probable that they were still in the vicinity.

While our friends were staring at these evidences of other presence than their own, undecided whether to continue on or turn back, a gruff voice called out:

"Hullo, Dusky Darrell! what you doin' here?"

All looked quickly in the direction from which they supposed the ejaculation had come. What was their surprise when they saw a half-dozen heads, surmounted by coon-skin caps rise from behind some rocks near by. The heads were followed by as many pairs of shoulders, and

the next instant the entire bodies of six stalwart men rose in view! They were a party of hunters, brawny, muscular fellows, every one of them, and the very picture of rugged health, fearlessness and good-nature. They were armed to the teeth, and well prepared to encounter the hostile savages that infested that region and their rough, weather-beaten faces showed that they were accustomed to the vocation in which they were now engaged.

As the hunters came out from behind the rocks and approached our party, there was one among them who deserves particular attention. He advanced first, and his actions afterward proclaimed him the leader of the little band. He was a short, stumpy man, with gray hair and beard, small black orbs and a pleasant countenance. He showed by his dress, actions and speech that he was an old borderer who had spent the greater part of his life on the mountains and prairies, roaming over the wildest portions of the American continent, and courting the dangers they contained.

It was this man who had first hailed the fugitives, and as he came forward now at the head of the party of hunters, he repeated the words:

"Hullo, Darrell, what you doin' here?"

Darrell looked at him, with a blending of astonishment and drollery in the expression of his face.

"Skin me fur a beaver, and smash me into the middle of next week, ef 'tain't Zeph Brown!" he ejaculated.

"Calc'late you never spoke truer words," responded the old hunter, seizing the hand of his friend. "This is Zeph Brown, sure's shootin', and I reckon thar's as much of him here as thar was six years ago when we camped in this very gorge. But what are you doin' in these parts? Ain't trappin', I take it—Hullo! got a thunderin' lot of pelts behind you. Who's these chaps you got in tow?" he asked, eying Rathburn and Perkins, the latter of whom was gazing at the hunters through his eye-glasses.

"This feller's handle is Rathburn," returned Darrell, jerking his thumb toward the person named. "He's sorter green like, but thar ain't a better man this side of the Mississipp. He's a gentleman, out and out. That other'n over thar, he's called 'Dolphus Perkins by everybody but me, and I calls him Spider, which, I'll sw'ar, is the best handle. He's a fust-rate lad in his place, I makes no doubt, but the sight of an Injun's top-knot makes him think of home and friends. Boys, this is my old right bower, Zeph Brown, a coon as are good fur six red-skins all the time, and never misses the bull's-eye at six hundred."

With this, Darrell slid out of the saddle and joined the party of hunters, with two or three of whom he was acquainted.

"What's happened to bring you up in these parts ag'in?" he asked, turning to Zeph Brown.

"Wal, nuthin' to speak on," was the reply. "These chaps, all good friends of mine, wanted me to come with 'em and spend the summer huntin' and trappin', and I jined 'em more fur 'commoda-tion than any thing else. But look here, Darrell, whar'd you pick up that purty gal yer friend's got on his hoss?"

"We hain't got time to talk 'bout that now," answered the trapper, beginning to speak rapidly. "I'll tell you 'bout the gal when time ain't so precious, but jist now we've got sumthin' else to do. The long and short of it is this: we're follered by Injuns."

"Injuns?" echoed Zeph.

"Yas—Blackfeet. They've been after us the whole day, and I reckon we're lucky in comin' across you 'fore they overtook us. The varmints can't be more'n two or three miles away this minute."

"What they follerin' you fur?"

"They want this little gal—we took her from 'em last night, you see. She's been a captive fur nigh onto ten years, and she's got a mother down in Missouri as wants to see her, and we're determined to take her thar or kick the bucket ourselves. But I will tell you the story some other time. We'd better stir our stumps, and git under cover 'fore the Injuns arrive."

"How many are they?"

"Jist ten, precisely."

"Hurrah, boys!" shouted Zeph to his comrades "we've got some red-skins to rub out a'ready! Here, Simms, take these hosses and lead 'em back thar whar we've got ourn cached."

Darrell assisted Myrtle to alight, and then Adolphus and Rathburn dismounted, submitting their animals to the care of the men, who speedily led them out of sight. The hunters were all plainly delighted at this unexpected opportunity of surprising and dealing destruction to the band of Indians, and they hurriedly made preparations to meet their hated enemies. As may be conjectured, our friends were overjoyed by this very fortunate and opportune meeting with old Zeph Brown and his party, and they now believed they might continue their homeward journey to-morrow unpursued.

All now concealed themselves among the rocks where the hunters had hidden at the approach of the fugitives, and there they lay in wait for the unsuspecting Blackfeet.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AMBUSH IN THE GORGE.

DUSKY DARRELL went to the mouth of the gorge to take a look at the Indians, and see how far away they were. In a minute he shouted back to his companions:

"The imps have come to a stand out yender, 'bout half a mile away. They're lookin' in this direction, and I guess as how they're holdin' a consultation."

After delivering this piece of intelligence, the trapper still kept his position and watched the motions of the savages. Those behind the rocks waited eagerly for further information, all with the muzzles of their deadly rifles protruding over the top of the breastworks, ready to pour a murderous volley into their enemies. Myrtle was hid in a deep niche, where she would not be in the way of the men, and where the shots of the savages could not reach her.

Five minutes later a faint, distant whoop was heard, and the next instant Darrell came bounding back into the pass with the agility of an antelope. He leaped over the rocks and crouched down among the men, and then hastily primed his gun afresh.

"Keep shady, boys," he said. "Don't show yer top-knots, and don't make any more noise than you can."

"What now?" asked one of the men, as the distant whoop was heard again. "Are they coming?"

"Comin' like lightnin'," was the quiet response. "After consultin' a spell, they all set up a screech and come dashin' right in this direction. Don't you hear the clatter of thar hosses' hoofs?"

All listened and heard the sound. The dusky horsemen were indeed approaching at the top of their speed.

"Do you think they'll halt outside 'fore enterin'?"

"No, they won't halt ag'in. They think we're tryin' to hide from 'em, and they'll rush right in without thinkin' of gittin' shot."

"Let 'em come," muttered Zeph Brown. "They're only hastenin' to destruction. I guess thar isn't many shooters in this gang that's goin' to miss thar aim."

"True fur you, Zeph," said one of his comrades. "We'll hit the mark plum' center, and make short work of the ten rascals; ef we don't I'll draw in my horns. I wouldn't sw'ar that Spider over yender 'ud make hisself famous though."

The pounding of hoofs on the hard turf grew more and more distinct, sounding like distant thunder, growing louder and louder as it came momentarily nearer. A half-minute passed—the confused clatter sounded just outside now, as the barbarians came sweeping on to their death. Each second they were expected to appear.

"Git ready, boys," said Darrell, rapidly. "Keep hid, and don't shoot till they git opposite to us. Each one select his man, and let fly when I give the word."

Just then there was a tumultuous pounding and rushing, and a wild, blood-curdling whoop rent the air, reverberating among the crags and peaks like the cries of a score of demons.

In an instant a single horse, with a half-naked Indian on his back, dashed into view. He was followed by another and another, until the whole band had dashed round the corner of the cliff, and then they came thundering into the gorge pell-mell, their deafening cries awakening the mountain echoes, their flashy dress flying in the breeze, and their steeds foaming and panting with heat and fatigue.

There was a rapid "click! click!" as of a number of rifles being cocked, and then a voice that rung through the gorge like a bugle-blast, cried out:

"Ready, boys—every one—fire!"

There was a flash like lightning—a jarring, stunning report, caused by the simultaneous discharge of several rifles—and then a heavy cloud of sulphurous smoke dimmed the vision. The wildest confusion ensued. There was a terrific plunging, rearing and kicking of frantic animals—a heavy falling of bodies—a shrieking, horrid and unearthly, from Indians writhing in the agonies of death—all creating a terrible din. Six savages were slain, and one wounded, and that number of riderless horses dashed headlong toward the mouth of the gorge, their heads thrown back and their eyes strained half out of their sockets, in the agony of violent fear.

Then rose a series of howls from the surviving savages, as they wheeled their frightened steeds and galloped after the others.

The hunters cheered lustily as they leaped from behind the rocks, and some of them uttered a regular war-whoop. They rushed to the bloody scene, where a half-dozen savages were stretched out in death, and their shouts of triumph mingled with the terrified yells of the enemy.

Dusky Darrell, remembering that Myrtle was not provided with a horse, rushed forward to procure one for her. With some difficulty, he succeeded in capturing a high-spirited Indian pony, which he presented to the girl. The three escaped Blackfeet were, by this time, far out upon the plain, galloping homeward at full speed.

"Jerusalem! didn't we slaughter 'em nicely?" exclaimed Adolphus, moving among the dead bodies.

"Didn't we, though?" mimicked one of the hunters, putting a stress upon the word *we*.

"Next time, they'll know better than to come before such dangerous rifles as ours, won't they?" continued Adolphus.

"Indeed they ought to," replied the hunter, good-naturedly. "But which one of these varmints did you shoot, Spider?"

"Me?—oh! I killed this fellow," kicking the largest corpse to be seen. "I shot him through the heart, fair and square, as you see."

"Bah! I guess you didn't wipe that imp out," said Zeph Brown, approaching. "I drew a bead on him myself."

This assertion disconcerted Adolphus a little, but he quickly recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to reply:

"What are you talking about? I mean that *other* Indian, over there."

"He's the one I erased. I sw'ar it," said Darrell, firmly.

"No, I mean this one here."

"That is my man," remarked Rathburn, with a smile.

Adolphus turned red, and looked about on the faces of those around him. A hearty laugh was raised at his expense, and one man stepped forward and said:

"Let me see yer shooter, Spider."

The exquisite surrendered his gun to the speaker, almost mechanically. The hunter merely glanced at it, and then held it up to the view of his companions. Another boisterous guffaw burst from the crowd, and Perkins became still redder.

"Thunderation! what are you laughing at?" he demanded.

"Laughin' at you, kumrid," replied Dusky Darrell. "Just take a squint at that shootin'-iron, and I guess you'll understand it."

The discomfited fellow did as he was directed, and the cause of their mirth was made apparent. His gun had not been discharged! It was still cocked, and the cap on the tube, instead of being exploded, was just as it had been put on!

"Which Injun did you say you killed?" gravely asked one of the party, looking down at the dead bodies.

"He hasn't found but three of his victims yet," said another, "but if you'll let him alone he'll find the rest."

"By gracious! I don't understand why it didn't go off," declared Adolphus, turning his rifle over and over in his hands. "I'm certain I pulled hard enough at the trigger."

"Sure you pulled at the trigger?" asked Zeph Brown, with a chuckle.

"Certainly—that is—I pulled *something*, and pulled it hard enough to fire a cannon, too!"

"Wal, I'll tell you what it was," continued Zeph, his small black eyes fairly dancing. "You'll recollect as how I war clus' to you when we fired that volley into the Blackfeet? Jist before shootin' I happened to glance at you, and may I be skulped ef you didn't have yer finger hooked in the button-hole of yer coat, pullin' as though yer life depended on't!"

This caused another laugh at the expense of Adolphus, who declared it was a falsehood; that he had purposely reserved his fire when the others had shot, and that he was only joking about having killed an Indian!

But at this juncture occurred an incident that averted every mind from Adolphus. It will be remembered that six Indians were killed, and one wounded, by the volley from the whites. The wounded one was lying about a dozen yards away from the others, stretched upon his back, with one hand clutching his breast, and the other holding a heavy war-club. Rathburn, being the first to notice this sufferer, approached him to see if any thing could be done for him. He was wounded in the right breast, and had been bleeding profusely, but his calm, stoical face exhibited no signs of pain. He was a young warrior, strong-limbed, broad-chested and finely-formed, and from the many devices on his black fox-skin mantle, must have been noted for his great achievements of bravery and strength.

Moved to pity by the sight of so young and brave a warrior on the eve of an untimely death, Rathburn bent over him to see if his wound was mortal. The Indian evidently mistook his design. His face became darkened by a horrible, revengeful look, and before his purpose could be divined, he leaped to his feet with a yell and confronted the white man! He did not pause here, but whirled his club in the air like a flash, and dealt Rathburn a blow on the head that felled him senseless to the earth! Clear and loud through the silent gorge, rolled the terrible war-cry of the Blackfoot, and he bent over his prostrate victim, seemingly determined to take one more scalp before succumbing to death.

At the chilling sound, every man's eyes were turned upon the scene. Before any of them could go to the assistance of the young man, however, there was a rustle and a rush, and a light figure darted by them like a rocket. It was Myrtle Forrest. She sprang to the spot where, in another moment a frightful tragedy would have been enacted, and seized the uplifted arm of the Indian. There was a glitter and a flash—a downward gleam, like a vertical ray of light—a groan and a fall, and there were two prostrate forms on the ground instead of one! The girl turned away, calmly wiped the blood from her knife and returned the weapon to her belt.

For a moment a hush was upon every tongue. Then the rough, hardy hunters set up a shout of approbation, and were clamorous in their praise of the heroic girl who had saved the life of the young man. But she turned from them with a gesture of impatience.

"It is nothing," she said, in a clear, steady voice. "I was the only one who saw the Indian knock him down, and if I had not tried to save him I should have been a heartless wretch indeed. Look to him—he may be dead, after all."

This reminded the men that Rathburn needed their immediate attention. He was still lying on his face insensible. They turned him over on his back, and used every means at their command to restore him to consciousness. He was like a dead man. For several minutes he showed no signs of returning life, and when he did, it was only after they had bared his arm, pricked it with a knife and started the blood. Then he began to breathe audibly, the muscles of his face twitched, and at length he opened his eyes and sat up. A half-hour later he was himself again, and was moving among his friends as full of life as ever. He was much surprised when he learned that Myrtle had saved his life, but he said nothing to her at that time. He

chose to wait until a more suitable opportunity offered before venturing to tender his thanks to his fair preserver.

About two hours after the event recorded, Myrtle was standing apart from her friends, leaning on a huge boulder in a thoughtful mood. She looked doubly beautiful in the light of the setting sun, that came streaming horizontally into the gorge—standing there in a slightly recumbent position, her pure brow surmounted by the head-dress of variegated beads and feathers, her dark hair falling negligently over shoulders and arms, her cheeks tinged like the sunny side of a peach, and long, silken lashes veiling her glorious eyes, which just now were bent upon the ground in that motionless, steadfast manner indicating the mind to be completely wrapped up in itself, and utterly oblivious to all else. Rathburn saw her, and thought he had never seen any thing half so lovely and picturesque. Actuated by a sudden impulse, he approached and stood by her side. She did not look up nor move; she did not know he was near until he spoke.

"Myrtle."

She came out of her reverie with a slight start, and her eyes met his inquiringly.

"Myrtle," he repeated, "I am here to thank you for saving my life. I can well understand that you will regard it as a mere act of duty or kindness, but it was a noble and heroic deed—"

"My friend," interrupted the maiden, looking steadily at him, "will you grant me a very simple favor?"

"Gladly."

"Then, please let this subject pass. It is not worth speaking of, and, besides, having never before taken the life of a human being, I do not care to be reminded of it."

"You regret the act, then?"

"Not in the least. If the same thing should occur again, I would repeat the act. I regret the necessity that compelled me to slay the Indian, but it is a pleasure to know that I rendered a service to a very valuable friend, to whom I partially owe my liberty."

Rathburn felt a strange thrill of joy at these words. He fancied those dark eyes looked almost tenderly upon him as she spoke, and he became possessed by a wild, ridiculous idea, to which, a moment after, he would have been ashamed to confess.

"You may find some consolation," said he, "in the reflection that the Indian was already mortally wounded, so that, in saving my life, you only hastened his death. But I promised to grant you the favor you asked of me. I presume you are here to view the sunset?" he added, by way of changing the subject.

"That is why I took my stand here," she replied, "but I fell into a deep reverie, and I forgot my object."

"Do you like to watch the sun go down?"

"Oh! very much," she answered, with childish enthusiasm. "I often long for evening to come, that I may seek a lonely spot and watch the beautiful sunset. As I look at those clouds of crimson, gold and purple, I could not, if I would, deny the existence of a brighter and better world beyond them. I have thought of dear, lost parents, as dwelling there in that unseen world with God and his angels, and when the sun went down and twilight came, I loved to think the bright evening-star was my mother's eye, looking down on her child. But that is past now. My mother lives, and Heaven willing, I shall see her again on earth."

Myrtle's voice faltered, and dropping her head upon her breast, she gave way to her emotion for a time. When she looked up, the storm had passed and she was calm as ever.

"Are you, then, so glad that you are soon to meet your mother?" asked Rathburn, with a pleasant smile.

She looked at him in surprise.

"Have you a mother?" she asked, in a low tone—"one who loves you, and whom you love?"

"By the mercy of Heaven, I have."

"Then you must understand my feelings!"

"I do," he replied; "I asked you an idle question. But let it pass. In your new home among the white people, you would be a stranger among strangers but for your parents, and possibly you will be pleased to have other friends. Would an occasional visit from me be distasteful to you?"

"How can you ask? If Providence permits me to reach my new home, I shall want to see you often—very often."

"Why, Myrtle?"

"Because I shall always regard you as one of my dearest friends," she replied, innocently.

"Thanks—thanks! But I fear, Myrtle, I shall not be permitted to see you as frequently as I could wish, as our homes will be far apart. Yours is in St. Louis, mine in Boston."

"Where is that?"

"On the Atlantic coast."

"So far away? Oh! I am very sorry."

It was not plain to Rathburn, by any means, why these earnestly-spoken words filled him with such strange pleasures. Why had he become so interested in this wild prairie-flower? Had he already fallen in love with her? Of course not in so short a time, and yet her expressions of mere friendship thrilled him with a glad, hopeful feeling. But did not her eyes express more than friendship or gratitude? He thought so at first, but recollecting that Myrtle Forrest was wholly unaccustomed to the usages of civilized society, and that her words and looks were the reflection of a simple, truthful heart, he banished the idea immediately.

They continued conversing until the golden twilight vanished in the dark shades of night, and the camp-fire of the hunters was kindled. Then, while

the men were gathered around the fire, talking and preparing the evening meal, Rathburn sought Myrtle's side, a little apart from the rest, and enjoyed a long and pleasant conversation with her, greatly to the disgust of Adolphus.

The bodies of the dead Indians had been removed from the gorge to the open prairie, and a few hours after nightfall a large number of wolves collected around them and had a grand feast. The clamor of the ravenous animals made such a din that it would have been useless to attempt to sleep while it continued; but they ceased their noise long before midnight, and the party in the pass lay down to rest. The tired fugitives slept soundly after their exertions of the day and preceding night, and rose in the morning much refreshed.

Preparations were now made to resume their homeward journey. The horses were led forth, including the Indian pony captured by Darrell, which was mounted by Myrtle, and when the sun rose they were all in their saddles, ready to start. After spending some time in taking leave of their friends, the hunters, they departed, and shortly after were careering gayly across the plains toward the States.

CHAPTER XII. CONCLUSION.

WE will not tire the reader with a detailed account of that tedious journey to the land of civilization—of the long days' rides, and nights of rest in the open air—of the alternate reign of tempest and sunshine, and of the dangers through which they safely passed. Upon all this it is unnecessary to dwell. Suffice it to say they were not troubled by Indians after leaving the hunters' camp in the gorge, and no serious mishap befell them through all.

One day, early in the month of June, our little party of adventurers galloped into the small trading post of Independence. Here Dusky Darrell bartered his furs for such articles as he stood in need of, and then they procured lodging with the intention of remaining in Independence until the following day. The next morning they rose bright and early to continue their journey. Then it was that the trapper surprised his friends by announcing his determination to go no further.

"Why, what's the matter, Darrell?" inquired Rathburn.

"Nuthin', as I knows on," he answered, "but I'm not goin' any furdur, that's said. No use, you know, besides it's a purty good distance to St. Louey, and this are 'bout as clus' to the civilized world as I ginerally git. You can take the gal to her mother, bein' as you're trav'lin' right in that d'rection. Tell the lady she needn't hunt up Dusky Darrell to offer him a reward fur what he's been and done, but—"

"But what?" asked Rathburn, noticing the trapper's hesitation.

"You mought ax her to remember a feller once in a while in her—her—prayers."

The trapper dropped his eyes in confusion, and a crimson glow burned on his swarthy cheeks as he uttered these words.

"Oh, I know she will do that!" exclaimed Myrtle; "and as for me—oh! I shall pray for you every day."

"God bless you, little 'un! You ought to be an angel, and ef thar's a better world on t'other side of the grave, you'll git thar, sartin. Maybe you'll meet this beaver thar, trappin' around among the rivers and runs."

"I hope so; but shall we never see you again on earth?"

"Wal, thar's no tellin'. I mought step over to St. Louey one of these days, and stay an hour or so, but yer's as ain't goin' to promise. Good-by, youngster."

He held out his hand to Rathburn. The young man took it in both of his, and pressed it.

"Good-by, Darrell, good-by!" he said, with much feeling. "I hope and pray we shall meet again before long."

"Count me in thar. Hate to leave you, youngster, smash me if I don't; no use talkin', though. Took a powerful likin' to you, somehow or other; make a good hunter; grit to the backbone. No use thinkin' we'll never meet ag'in, fur it's just likely this beaver 'll git it into his noddle to take a tramp through the States, 'fore many moons have gone. Meantime, you mought take the trouble 'casionally to think of a chap named Dusky Darrell. Wagh!"

"Believe me, I shall never forget that name, nor the person who bears it. Heaven bless you, Darrell!"

"Spider," continued the trapper, extending his hand to Adolphus, as a smile broke over his countenance, "Spider, good-by. You're a first-rate feller in the long run, though you're kinder afeard of Injuns, smash me ef you ain't!"

"No, I am not exactly afraid of them," argued Adolphus, "but, you see, I am not—that is, I am not accustomed to them. I'll tell you what, Darrell, this isn't the last time you'll see Adolphus Perkins in these parts. I started from home last summer with the intention of crossing the plains, and since I failed to succeed on that occasion, I'll be hanged if I don't try it again shortly. I'm determined to go to California, overland, before the Pacific railroad is built, and, as likely as not, it will be on a wedding tour!"

Here the exquisite glanced furtively at Myrtle.

"All right, Spider; ef you does come out in this d'rection ag'in, I hope I'll run afoul of you. But I'm detainin' you too long. Smash me ef I likes to see you go. Myrtle, my wild flower, would you kiss a rough old cuss like me?"

Would she? He had scarcely uttered the request when she threw her arms impetuously around his neck, and pressed her soft, red lips to his!

"I don't want to part from you," she murmured. "I wish you would go home with me. I am sure mamma will be disappointed if you don't."

"Thar, little gal, don't talk that way to me. Ef yer mother's disapp'inted 'cause I ain't with you, tell her ef she wants any more jobs done to send me a message. The time fur talkin's over. We must leave one another now, and travel out different ways. Maybe we'll meet ag'in—maybe we won't. Take keer of yerselves, and if ever you youngsters want to take a hunt with this beaver yer's what's ready at any time."

The moment for final adieux had come, and all wore mournful faces as they parted, perhaps to meet no more on earth. A strong attachment had sprung up between the eccentric trapper and the two young men, and as for Myrtle, he seemed to feel a yearning, fatherly affection for her. Something very like a tear glistened on his brown cheek, as he bade them a last farewell, and then, mumbling some unintelligible words, he turned away and hastily left them.

Dusky Darrell, the trapper, was gone.

One morning at a comparatively early hour, a cab rolled up in front of a handsome residence on one of the principal streets of St. Louis, and stopped. The black driver leaped to the ground, and opened the door of the carriage, to let its occupants out, at the same time politely informing them that this was the place they were in search of. The first person who appeared was a handsome gentleman, in whom we recognize Henry Rathburn. He stepped out upon the pavement, and then turned and assisted Myrtle Forrest to alight. The girl was still arrayed in her fanciful Indian garb, and she trembled with pleasurable excitement as she looked up at the house before her, and thought how soon she would be in the arms of her mother. The last one to leave the carriage was Adolphus Perkins, who, after undergoing a complete renovation at the hands of a skillful barber, was somewhat improved in appearance.

Our three friends mounted the broad stone steps of the fine residence, and plied the knocker.

The door was opened by a servant.

"Is this where Mrs. Forrest lives?" inquired Rathburn.

"It is, sir," was the reply.

"Is the lady within?"

"Yes, sir. She is sitting in the parlor alone at this moment. I will announce you, and—"

Before the servant could proceed further the young man pushed him aside, and entered the wide hall, followed by the girl and the exquisite. Rathburn then told the astonished domestic to go about his business, first learning from him which door opened into the room occupied by his mistress, and the fellow, at a loss to understand what it all meant, moved away and left them alone. They had made up their minds on their way hither how they should act. Leaving Adolphus and the girl in the hall, Rathburn opened the door on his right and entered the parlor, taking care to close the door behind him.

He found himself in an elegantly-furnished apartment, with carpet of finest texture beneath his feet, and walls hung with rich paintings. It was such an apartment as is seen only where taste and means are combined in fitting it up. But he took no notice of the surroundings. His eyes alighted upon something of more interest to him, and more worthy of their attention. On the opposite side of the room, sitting by a wide, open window, where the summer breeze gently swayed the lace curtains, sat a tall, handsome lady, dressed in deep mourning, with a book lying open on her lap. Her hair was dark as a starless night, and dressed in a plain but becoming style, while her eyes, large and luminous, were the very counterpart of her daughter's. A sad light burned in their dark depths, and sorrow had left its traces on her brow; yet, withal, on her face dwelt an expression of calm, sweet resignation, like a light from heaven come to dispel the gloom that enshrouded her heart.

As the door opened the lady looked up, and seeing a stranger standing there, she rose to her feet in amazement, letting the book she had been reading fall to the floor.

"Pardon the intrusion, madam," said Rathburn, doffing his hat with a respectful bow. "I have acted rudely in entering your presence without permission, but have done it with due deliberation, and will explain immediately. You are Mrs. Forrest, I presume?"

She bowed assent.

"Madam, I am Henry Rathburn, at your service. I am the bearer of important news."

"News for me, sir?"

"Yes, madam—for you."

"Will Mr. Rathburn be seated?" said the lady, pointing to a chair, and showing much surprise and curiosity in her looks.

The gentleman accepted the proffered seat, and after a brief pause, went on to say:

"Mrs. Forrest, you once had a daughter—"

The woman started, and bent upon him a keen, searching look, her manner quickly changing from calm listlessness to excited interest.

"Sir?" she said, as if apprehensive that she had misunderstood him.

"You once had a daughter—"

"Once had?" she repeated, in a husky voice.

"Whom you thought killed, but who in reality was only captured by the Indians," continued Rathburn.

"Yes, yes; do you know aught of her?"

"Hear me further, madam, if you please. Of course you remember an interview you had with the trapper, Darrell, last year, and how he promised to bring your daughter home, or die?"

Mrs. Forrest clasped her hands convulsively. "I understand it all, now," she gasped. "The trapper is dead, and you are here to apprise me of it!"

"You mistake—Darrell is not dead."

"What! he lives?"

"He lives, and has returned to Missouri."

The widow bit her lips to hide her emotion.

"And he sent you to tell of his failure," she murmured. "Poor fellow! Mortification need not have prevented him from coming himself, for, though success did not crown his noble and disinterested efforts in my behalf, I know he did all that man could do."

"Mrs. Forrest," said Rathburn, "you wrong Darrell, even while speaking so well of him. If you knew him as well as I, you could not think for an instant that he would return so soon without the prize."

The lady gave a violent start, and then, pale with agitation, she rose and stood before her visitor in a pleading attitude.

"Mr. Rathburn," said she, her voice shaking, "you can not blame me for feeling a mother's impatience to know all. I am sure you have more to tell than you have told. Please let me hear the whole truth at once; this uncertainty is intolerable."

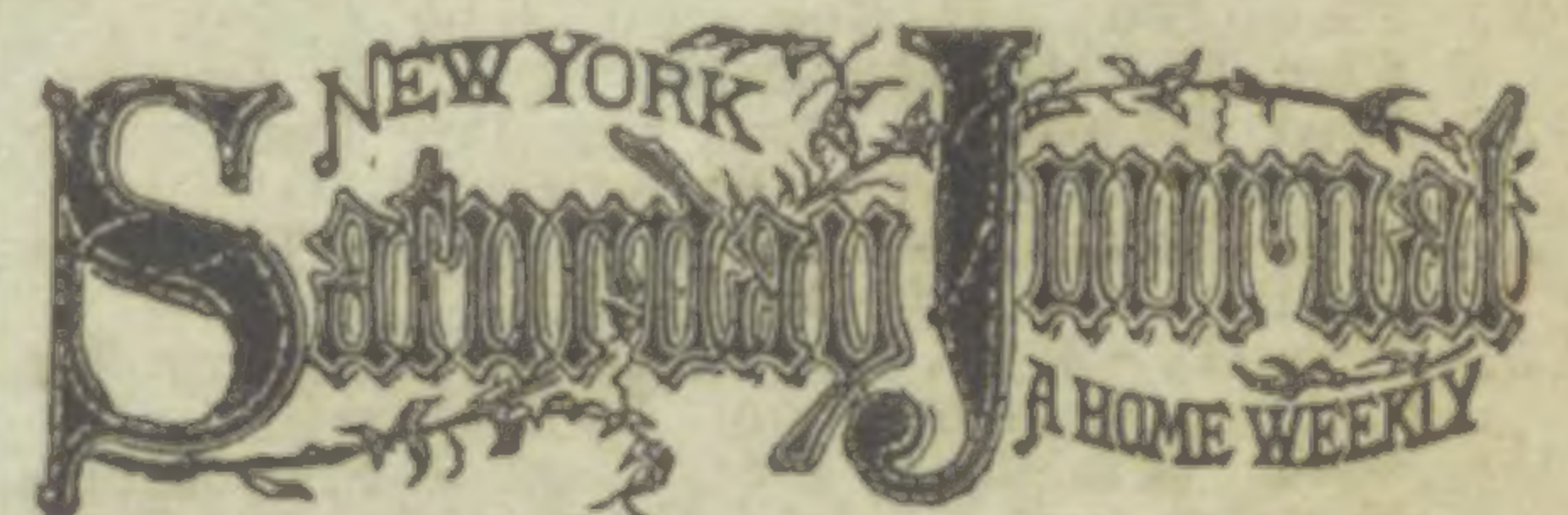
At that moment there was a sound in the hall—a suppressed cry, and the rustle of a dress—and then the door flew open, and Myrtle bounded into the room, followed by Adolphus Perkins. One moment, mother and daughter stood looking at each other—the next, they were locked in each other's arms, weeping tears of unutterable joy.

We pass over the scene that followed. No pen can describe it, much less ours, and it must be left to the imagination of the reader. That the meeting was a joyful one—after the singular separation of nearly ten years—need not be told; and the thanks, congratulations and explanations that came after the first burst of rapturous delight, may, also, be more easily imagined than detailed.

Rathburn and Adolphus lingered a week in St. Louis, and were the guests of Mrs. Forrest while there; and when, at last, they took leave of their fair friends and set out for the distant Bay State, they felt more as though they were leaving, than returning home. Many times afterward, however, both found occasion to visit St. Louis, and on each of these occasions they were surprised and delighted at the rapidity with which the fair Myrtle was acquiring the accomplishments of her sex, and becoming educated in civilized society's ways. They were always received cordially, and so much attention was paid to them that their visits seemed wonderfully short.

On one of these visits, the enamored Adolphus found himself *tele-a-tele* with Myrtle in the flower-garden. Embracing the opportunity, he popped the question like a cavalier, and was astounded beyond measure when he learned that his cousin had preceded him! But he took the blow philosophically, and was one of the groomsmen at the grand wedding of Rathburn and Myrtle, on which occasion he announced his intention of going West again soon, in search of a wife!

THE END.



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